

1860

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THUS BLACKBIRD AND I BEGAN THE FIRST LEG OF
OUR JOURNEY

At the SIGN *of the* SILVER SHIP

by
Stanley Hart Cauffman



Illustrated by
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At the Sign of The Silver Ship

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While through both promise and desire this book must be dedicated to the little boy who sat propped in his bed to hear me weave the tale, I cannot allow it to go to press lacking an appreciation to the Harts: E. Stanley; Mary C.; and E. Stanley, Jr.; without whose affectionate interest and invaluable criticism this story would have likely remained between my little boy and me.

S. H. C.

Wissahickon, Pa.

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At the Sign of The Silver Ship

CHAPTER I

TELLING OF HOW I CAME TO VISIT AT THE SILVER SHIP

WHEN I was a little boy I very well remember my dear Grandfather Tremaine telling me stories of the pirates, and a line or two of a song he taught me regarding one, Captain Robert Kidd, how

“He murdered William Moore,
And he left him in his gore,”

this same William being his chief gunner, I think, still haunts my mind with its most unsavory criminal suggestion. Even as a growing lad I have seen great merchantmen, and at times even His Majesty's armed frigates, held in the river on a rumor that Blackbeard was operating off the Capes; but that I, preordained by my poor mother for the pulpit, should have ever allied myself with the scheming of a buccaneering rascal ——!

It came about in this way:

When I was scarcely more than an infant a great scourge of smallpox ravished the good city,

of William Penn. My father, a goldsmith by trade and something of a landholder in this new Friends' colony although a supporter of the English Church, was then a member of the High Assembly governing the district. With a firmness and courage ever his he had come to the determination that it was for him to remain at his smithing and his guidance of municipal affairs, as an example to the more timorous tradespeople who had flown into a panic at the first sign of the plague, and were for putting up their shutters and rushing into still greater dangers to escape from the infection. While quite fearless on his own account he had first seen to it that my mother, her father old Doctor Theophilus Tremaine, my two older brothers and I were removed to a farm at Barren Hill, about four leagues from the city's centre, and where he visited us at intervals throughout our temporary exile.

We had been thus banished from the town perhaps a month when upon one of these excursions my father complained of a lassitude, and within a short day was himself desperately ill with the disease, and in the very bosom of the family he would have readily sacrificed his life to protect.

My dear mother cared for him day and night, and all precautions for the safety of us children were exercised. Small as I was at the time I think I can still recall the dipping of my hands in

the harsh vinegar, and the choking smoke of the pungent but purifying herbs. But ere long, despite all that was done, my two brothers were fellow sufferers, although in a much milder and less dangerous form than my father. My Grandfather Tremaine, owing to his advanced age, had long since ceased the practice of his profession, but now he was of great assistance in such an emergency; and while hourly exposed to the disease neither he nor I was taken ill from it, which seems many times the case with the aged or the very young.

Desperate as was my father's condition he eventually responded to the care, devotion and prayers of my mother, and shook from him the hand of death; but no sooner were he and his two sons upon the highroad to recovery, than my poor mother—wearing and worn by long days of anxiety and nights of vigil—was herself stricken; and in a very few hours passed away.

My good father was never completely reconciled to this early loss of his helpmeet, and remained unwed to his grave. He was a kind and thoughtful parent, and any small success which his three sons have now gleaned is entirely due to his careful training of us, his homely precepts, and above all else his never flagging faith and noble example.

When my oldest brother reached sufficient

years he was sent away, as was his great desire, to join His Majesty's soldiery in England. Later, my second brother donned the brave regalia of an English midshipman, and sailed in search of adventure. I, yet to grow to be the largest and strongest of them all, was endowed with an excellent opportunity for an education, of which I fear I took but little advantage; and on my twentieth birthday was summoned into a solemn session by my kindly parent, and informed that I was to further prepare myself for ordination as a minister of the Church of England.

To me this came as a most unwelcome suggestion, my personality, temperament, and desires being so greatly in contrast to its fulfillment. I set to work, therefore, and eventually won my father to abandon the idea, although he was exceptionally tenacious toward any wish of my dead mother's, which I learned this to have been.

This signal victory having taken some months, and not knowing for just what I was best fitted, I began to look about, under my parent's persuasion, for some form of useful occupation; but so much there was which beckoned me of pleasure and diversion that when many succeeding months had come and gone I knew no more of what I wanted to do than upon the day I first set out. My good father, seeing in what direction the matter was leading, allowed me a final fortnight of

unrestricted revelry; and one bright September day invited me into his study and laid the case before me with such decision that I could but respect his attitude although it spelt the termination of all my clamorous gaiety.

"Young man," said he, "your oldest brother, Theophilus, is a cornet in the King's Horse, for the oldest son of your family has always gone into the army. Your other brother, Roger, is likewise now an ensign in His Majesty's Navy for the reason that the second of our house has, when possible, taken to the sea. The clergy was chosen for your pursuit, and you have refused it. I am not about to complain upon that score, although I would have had it otherwise. You once informed me that if I insisted upon your ordination I would become the father of the worst minister in the ecclesiastic annals. At the time I agreed with you, and your subsequent conduct has done much to strengthen that belief. To be the father of such I have, personally, no distinctive ambitions. Neither have I—let me impress this very forcefully upon you—neither have I any great desire to be celebrated as the father of the most scatter-brained, roistering young jackanapes who ever leered at his neighbor's wife or cracked a pate in a tavern brawl. Therefore, you must choose a trade—and be apprenticed to it at once."

"I do not care particularly for any trade," I answered musingly.

"Just so," he responded. "I did not care particularly for it myself when I was young, but as an eighth son I did not even have the choice of the clergy to reject. For me it was a trade—or starvation. There was not enough for all."

"But you have now enough for us three!"

"I have nothing for a waster or a do-nothing."

"I will be neither!" I said, with some heat. "I think you do me an injustice."

"What is your choice, then?"

"I will consider the matter most carefully, and let you know."

"Good!" he rejoined. "And I must ask for the decision within fifteen minutes."

"What!" I cried. "Why, I can't think of anything in fifteen minutes!"

"You have had fifteen months and more," he answered, drawing out his great silver watch; "fifteen minutes I said, and two of them are now flown forever. Come, Basil! Put your mind to it!"

"And if I refuse?"

"Out you go from beneath my roof, your pockets empty."

"May I never return?"

"You will be more than welcome when you

have proved to me that Basil Myles has earned and saved the equivalent of his share in my estate."

"I had best buy me a pistol, and take to the road," I said, with a sickly grin.

"Your work must, of course, be honest. Seven minutes remain."

I stared out of the study window which faced down High Street—and thought. First and foremost I did not want to lose that goodly portion of land and moneys which would some day be mine if I obeyed. Secondly, it seemed certain that I must give up my gay and care-free life for one of toil, and I knew my father would stick rigidly to his word, so I must choose wisely, for it is a vital matter to select all in a moment the path which you must follow to the end of your days. The great trouble was I did not have an idea of anything I wanted to do.

"Well ——" I said—and paused. My father's eyes were on the face of his timepiece, and he never raised them from the rapidly creeping hands. I lifted mine to the street without, and I saw the sign of Kenny, the saddler. He was a good soul, and would like me for a 'prentice right well; but the remembrance of the odor of the fresh hides crept upon me, and I rejected that. There was Timothy Haste, the joiner, crossing the square below. That work was good, but I loathed

the man for some reason, and I thought further. My grandfather had been a doctor, but I was not overfond of the sight of suffering; and the 'prentice my father had at his goldsmithing shop must work so quiet and still at his bench—which I could never do. My poor mind was rapidly becoming a blank and the minutes flying fast, when I was awakened by a cheery cry in a lane near by the house:

“Ho! Burlington, ho!”

And then again, drawing nearer:

“Ho! Burlington, ho!”

It was none other than Peter the Peddler who ran a river shallop between Philadelphia and Burlington when there was trade enough to pay, and the river was clear of ice. A thousand times before I had listened to his warning cry of departure without its bringing anything particular to my mind, but to-day, just as my father was raising his fist to bring it down upon the desk as a termination to my interview and my future hopes, I recalled how, as a small boy, I had gone to Burlington to spend a week with my great-uncle Richard Tremaine at his inn there, *The Silver Ship*; and—so quickly can one's mind run on in an emergency—I remembered how happy he was to see me then, and how kindly he and his good wife had treated their little grandnephew; so with that, and just as my father's fist was de-

scending, I slipped under it, as it were, with the remark:

"I want to go up to Burlington, and be bound to my Uncle Dickon, the innkeeper."

"You want—what!" demanded my father, and glared at me as though he had suddenly discovered me a natural.

"I want to be bound to Uncle Dickon," I repeated.

"But," said he, after a moment's thought, "you can't be apprenticed to an innkeeper. Innkeeping is not a trade."

"Well, if it isn't it should be," I said.

"But it is not!" shouted my father.

"On the contrary," I answered, clinging to my first and only choice, for the fifteen minutes were now fled, "I think it is a very good trade indeed, so I have made it my preference, and I will go up with Peter the Peddler whenever you so wish."

My poor parent was naturally very much perturbed, and he doffed his wig and knit his brows, and cried out upon me for a fool, and probably called himself the same under his breath—but I stuck to it; and so, after an exchange of letters between my Great-uncle Dickon and my father, the latter, with many ominous waggings of his head and rollings of his eyes to heaven that it might witness his freedom from responsibility in

my choice and conduct, bid me and my brown bag "good-bye."

So thus it was that I came to live at the sign of The Silver Ship.

CHAPTER II

TELLING OF THE VISIT OF THE GREAT LADY

THE SILVER SHIP tavern is not situated in the city of Burlington proper. Instead it stands a bit back from the road some little distance south of the town. Not upon the main travelled highway, of course, for if there it would soon have lost that old-world charm and quaint rusticity which is its foremost fascination. It does not lie upon the river bank exactly, although a moist tang of the woodland breeze which sweeps across the wide blue stream aids the copious shade of the surrounding beech, buttonwood and chestnut trees to palliate the drowsy midsummer heat.

The building itself is long and low and homely, with floors of various levels and ceilings of various heights. Unexpected steps and window-seats and cupboards confront you at every turn; and just as you feel you have thoroughly familiarized yourself with each nook and corner, each cranny and crevice—lo! here is a little chimney-corner, or a winding stair, or perhaps a wide-flung sun-kissed casement—something ever new and bewitching, like an unexpected caress lightly brushed from the lips of love.

There were whitewashed walls both inside and out, grass-green shutters with heart-shaped eye-lets; and a great sheltering shingle roof over all added height and color to the trees which formed its coppiced setting; great rough-skinned chestnuts whose downy sprays blew like a benediction over the gables, or perhaps startled you in the dead of the night with thoughts of elfin gambols as the early frost rattled nuts upon the roof above; untidy plane trees scattering leaves and bark in picturesque confusion; swaying beech and green-plumed pine. All these aided in making The Silver Ship the one inn of all inns, the dearest haven of all havens, truly the very spot in all the land about which to weave a romance—and to ever after append and overrun with the clinging evergreen of mellow memories. Beautiful with each changing season, whether the snow swirled in the chimney or the bees boomed in the hollyhocks, the little Silver Ship had sought a heavenly harbor; and here it was one early autumn evening before its low green door that I deposited my traps and bag, and flung from me as well, I trust, some of my youthful irresponsibilities and wastrel ways, to become a goodly apprentice to the landlord, great-uncle Dickon Tremaine.

There are maids whom you learn to love with a sigh, and lads whom you love with a laugh, but Uncle Dickon you loved with a sly wink and a

throaty chuckle—a chuckle which ended in the stave of a song, a step or two of a sarabande, or a kissing of pretty Peg the bar-wench—that is, it might lead so if you followed Uncle Dickon's example—and Aunt Tulip was not about. How kind they both were, and how genuinely happy to have me with them, for theirs was a childless marriage. How good and generous and sweet and trusting, and despite everything, how quaintly funny—how utterly ridiculous—they both could be. If I tell you of the appearance of one you will know them both, for they were as near alike as the china shepherd and shepherdess which stood on the best room mantel. Uncle Dickon was in stature short. Not grotesquely so, but still far from tall, and stout. Unmistakably stout! And yet he gave the impression of having always been corpulent and husky of voice from the cradle, so that you accepted quite as a matter of course his really remarkable agility under his burden of flesh. His head, like his body, was large and round, and being as bald as an egg he usually wore, except on the warmest of days, a short-haired ginger-colored wig, the bristles of which stood directly in the air, giving him the customary appearance of complacent, not to say jocular, fright. His features were the most expressive and mobile ones imaginable. I will now always think of him as I saw him daily

sampling and tasting the "Silver Punch," a concoction for which the hostelry was justly celebrated and which was freshly brewed each morning for the day's consumption. Beside the huge bowl he stood, begirted by an apron whose dimensions compared favorably with the topsail of a frigate, and further accentuated the simile by curving forward over his rotundity as though conveyed by a spanking breeze. Resting theatrically upon the ball of one foot with the other toe pointed as though about to tread a measure, he raised with a flourish the great silver ladle to his pursed lips. A pause—and one eyebrow rose slightly. The bar-wench flew for the gin. The other eyebrow followed the same course. The chief cook dashed for the citron. A rocking of the great head, and the kitchen urchin who had measured the treacle cursed the day that he was born. Not, understand, that Uncle Dickon was ever really cross or acrimonious on any occasion, but he was exacting, and he possessed that something in his personality which attracted the affection of all who did his bidding, even though they might smile at times good-naturedly behind his back. I soon found it true that a suggestion of disapproval from him was apt to cut deeper than the bellowing rage of a more choleric disposition.

His one great characteristic was exaggeration, and he carried it, quite unconsciously it seemed,

to extraordinary lengths. There was no question that he had won for himself the most implicit faith in many unstable fabrications among his associates; and his great sincerity convinced the majority that what he told was actually true. There were times when I was uncertain whether he had pulled the wool over the sharp old eyes of Aunt Tulip,—and as a matter of fact most of these retailed exploits were scarcely for the ears of the womenfolk—but to the average denizen of the district his word was Holy Writ. Further, toward all he was ever courteous, and simply replete with bows, gestures and genuflections. Not that his attitude to a guest smacked in any way of the servile or the cringing! Rather it was a graceful compliment and a delicate courtesy of one courtling to another. I have frequently seen the lordly and intolerant traveller mollified to a ready appreciation of our hospitality, and the shabby apologetic trudger of the highways square his rusty shoulders and ruffle illustriously under my uncle's decorous yet hearty welcome. In short, the King would have abashed him none at all and the King's turnspit would have interested him much. Thus he strove to do the best he knew for all—and was generally exceptionally successful.

To me he was a second father. The Silver Ship was mine from the moment I arrived. And yet

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he was wise enough, and I know now, kind enough, to see that I was given plenty to occupy my full time, albeit the labor to which I was set proved more than pleasurable. Anything which Uncle Dickon thought best for me invariably met the approval of his good wife, so my welcome was doubly sincere from the very beginning, and I can only trust that the kindness they both displayed was in some measure requited by my true affection for them, and the manner in which I went about the tasks assigned me.

To a young man of my temperament could any life have appealed more than that of an exclusive yet popular inn with its setting of Paradisiacal rusticity? Ever aroused and abustle with the coming and going of wayfarers, from dawn to dusk, and long after, the low green door swung wide to the tune of jingling harness and neighing horses, the winding of coach-horns and the shouting of postilions. Within the hour, perhaps, there passed a many-colored pageant of ladies powdered and plumed, gentlemen with silver swords, bag-bowed hucksters, painted Indians, somber Friends, country lasses, travelling teachers, blustering soldiers, tilting their patrician noses at the cellar's best or guzzling our small beer with unquestionable relish. To me, whether they daintily picked at a pigeon in their private apartment or munched their bread and cheese in the corner of

the ordinary, each presented a problem of interesting speculation; and it would seem that I should never tire of mixing among them in my capacity of the landlord's assistant. I rose early each day, and saw to it that all and sundry were at their respective quarters—from the lowest groom in the stable to pretty Peggie who served the guests with thirst-quenching and thirst-inspiring liquors. At first my uncle rose with me to see that all was properly done, but before long he learned to lie abed as he should, for he was usually up until late in the night, as it was more often after the sun sinks that the tired travellers rap for accommodation at our door. I was happy though my day was long, and while I was free to come and go in the evening as I chose I knew no one thereabouts, and for my first few weeks at least, the novelty and clamor of *The Silver Ship* was sufficient of a loadstone that I stirred not out. Later, love held me fast.

Each evening when the toil of the day was done, there gathered about the great chimney-place, or on fair warm evenings, on the benches beneath the blustering buttonwood which guarded the door, a select and seldom changing coterie of the countryside gaffers: Master Sills, the chemist and tobacconist; Master Goodyside, the whitesmith; old Gregory Martin; Sneed, the barber, who did horse-leeching at spare times;

and Squire Dykes from the Hillside Farms. Then were the *good old days* extolled anew, with many recollections of wars and Indian battles, pirate encounters, horse-thieving, love-making, lean harvests, hard winters, and many strange and interesting adventures personally experienced by the tellers. They were all well up in years, those who composed this nightly gathering, but if their backs were bowed and their muscles slacked, I will vouch for it that their imaginations were equal to almost any recital, and their spirit of criticism enjoyed full vigor. As a rule, however, this latter was applied to the governmental errors of long ago. The questions and problems of the hour were settled or dismissed with a scant sniff or a shrug as being of little consequence.

The most popular entertainment for them, I early learned, was not their own reminiscences, however, but the alluring and romantic past of Uncle Dickon as recited by himself. I felt fairly certain at the time that these interminate narrations contained absolutely nothing in the way of truth, but where in the world the old landlord ever uncovered the thrilling exploits I have often wondered. According to him he must have experienced more sensational affairs in a fortnight than three average men could have squeezed into a long life; and what his good wife would have said had she known! And yet I am certain she would

have recognized it all as but vanity, which it surely was. The adventures were highly diverting, and it was as amusing as the tale itself to watch the coterie if, during the telling of some particularly graphic victory in the realm of Eros—for it would seem that hearts fell before the blandishments of Uncle Dickon as leaves before the frost,—Aunt Tulip drew near. His voice, ever throaty, would drop to a hoarse whisper, and his stubby digit would tap the side of his great nose in subtle warning, while the peccant eyes of his hearers would roll in her direction with a manner of guilt unmistakable to anyone except the trusting and philosophical landlady of The Silver Ship. There were times, these same tales being related so often, that I wondered if she did not know them and their inference as well as the rest; but of that I was to be enlightened later.

She, dear soul, (I learned this before I was a member of the household one full day) had been—and still was, for that matter—a worthy scion of the illustrious house of the *de Bournonvilles*. I, up to that time, was not familiar with the name; but it appeared from what Aunt Tulip told me that Royalty itself could make no prouder boast than that within its sacred veins there surged but a single corpuscle of this peerless family's blood. I had never been, until then, anything but proud of my ancestry, but I was to here

early learn that while from her standpoint their marriage had been of the most felicitous, from a de Bournonville prospect my aunt's espousal of a mere Tremaine was little short of a *mésalliance*. In truth I doubt if ever it would have come to pass had not a wayward fate encouraged her de Bournonville-born mother to fall beneath the matrimonial regard of one of undoubted worth but of less soul-stirring appellation. Thus Aunt Tulip had emerged into this imperfect world stigmatized beneath the surname of Muggins—and from which Tremaine was certainly a poetic if not a social refuge.

Just so surely as she never intruded upon his story-telling did Uncle Dickon acknowledge and believe in her family superiority; and he ever blessed that day that had wed him to this patrician blossom. It was, in fact, his boast that there lived but one branch of this illustrious family in the Colonies other than the one solely represented by his good wife, and that he momentarily expected a visit from them—wealthy and influential as they must be—to pay their humble respects to this noble kinswoman. Whether there was a spark of truth in even the existence of this collateral sprig I did not know, but that they had so far, during some thirty or forty-odd years of married life, managed to withstand this urgent call of the blood in no manner depressed him;

and so constantly and so sincerely did he refer to this expected interchange of courtesies, and so had he impressed it upon the little nightly gathering of friends before the fire, that they all looked forward to it with his cheery faith, and even eagerly inquired—if they had perchance missed an evening in the accustomed corner—whether it had taken place in their absence.

As for Aunt Tulip she seldom mentioned the matter at all; yet not often, I believe, did a knuckle unexpectedly rattle the inn door but it caused a flutter at the dear lady's heart.

When I had been a week or two at the inn there came a visitor a-knocking who caused a fluttering at my own heart—and it was so:

I had been out upon the coach-step before the door idling in the cool twilight, when about a bend in the road before me there came riding a slim, sweet figure on a great bay mare, followed at a suitable distance by a second horse bearing a fine, tall serving-man and a maid on a pillion behind him. The lady was wrapped about in a long black riding-cloak, and a large flapping hat was drawn well down over her head and brow; while as though to make recognition trebly impossible she still wore, although the sun had long since sunk, a black complexion-mask against the glare, held before her face by a small ivory button between her teeth, and through the eyeholes

of which her sharp-turning glances seemed to embrace us all with a look.

Her horse arrived a moment ahead of her attendants, and being very desirous to assist, the tardiness of her serving-man gave me the excuse to lift down my lady (and a delicious armful she made!), while he, seeing that all was well with his mistress, performed a like service for the broad-bosomed, blowzed-faced maid behind him. My lady said no word to me of thanks or displeasure at my attention, possibly because of the mask button between her teeth; and yet there was a certain shrinking from my touch and a haughtiness in her poise which told me she was not well pleased. If her great, slow-moving flunky expected to later receive a lecture on his duty the prospect did not seem to distress him any or bring down his high sense of dignity now that he had gotten onto his two feet; and he dragged off the saddle-bags and bundles with which his ride had been encumbered as though he was the master of the situation. My lady waited, with tapping foot, until the packages were in his arms, and while I held the door, went before him into the inn. She still kept to her mask, and it was the maid who addressed Aunt Tulip as the latter came forward to receive the party.

“Her Ladyship desires the best apartment, and will remain but an hour. She wishes the strictest

privacy, with your leave, and I and her man will see to her wants. He will lay a fire if there be none ready, and if aught be wanting I will do the telling of it."

My Aunt Tulip, quite accustomed to the whims of wayfaring gentry, took one glance at the masked face, a second at the quality of the cloak she wore, and apportioning a third between the two servants with her luggage, she courtesied, and in a moment was leading the way up the stairs. The masked lady followed close upon my aunt's heels, pursued by the buxom maid and the stolid lackey. There had been something in the holding of the strong, warm body of her in my arms, and in the glint of the life-light from her eyes; something in the carriage of her head (no de Bournonville could have surpassed her in dignity and arrogance), and the graceful sway of her figure beneath the cloak, which had made me bend my frank gaze upon her as she climbed the winding steps. Also, it seemed, as she turned at an angle of the landing, she, with accidental languor, allowed her glance to rest upon me. I was standing now in the full glare of a row of candles upon the mantel-shelf, but as she looked I saw, by the glow of the single dip Aunt Tulip carried, that she stopped still—as though she had seen a ghost over my shoulder—and clutched at her heart with her two white hands; and would have

stood longer but for the maid, who, noticing nothing, pushed on upon my lady's heels and urged her out of sight about the wind of the steps.

Now, after rubbing my chin in reflection, and assuring myself with what certainty I could under the circumstances that she looked like no one I had ever seen before, I decided that if I must be dismissed from doing her service indoors I could at least attend upon her horses, so to the stable I sent them, and sat me down near to the kitchen door to await the return of her serving-man.

First there was a fire to be had in the best chamber; and then more candles, and a drop of *moscatello*, with ale for the maid (I supposed). Then there was a squab to be spitted, and corn cakes, and cress; with bacon and sippet for the maid again. By and by, tea was to be brought, with sweet conserve; and the former was carefully brewed by Uncle Dickon himself, who had just arrived with some marketing, and borne aloft by his own hands, trailed by the phlegmatic lackey with the jam. As I hoped, the latter was soon back to the kitchen for his own provender. Giving his order to one of the wenches I refilled his tankard twice while it was prepared, and then sat me down at the table-side, while he munched away, and set about learning something of his delightful mistress.

If he had received no more food than he paid

for in information he would have arisen hungry. At first I was diplomatic and insinuant with him, keeping a bead on his tankard the while. Then I grew bolder, and finally shot questions at him from all angles. The result was all the same. Of course he had been warned to keep his own counsel, but even so I think to his personality was largely due the credit of being selected as an accomplice in a delicate venture. He sat like a great ox, munching, munching, with his elbows on the board and his knife and fork pointed heavenward, as though prepared to impale any unexpected release of manna. He might have been deaf for the most part, for many of my queries went unnoticed, yet his ears suggested a sprightly zeal as they rose and fell methodically in unison with his mastication. His left eye looked upon me, and all things, without emotion; his right orb was sightless and sunken.

His horses, he admitted unemotionally, were good. Particularly the bay? Particularly the bay. The roads, he admitted unemotionally, were bad. The roads to the south might perhaps prove better? They had come from the south. The roads to the north might perhaps prove better? They were not going north. Had they come far? Far enough. Were they going further? They were going back again. Was the journey for pleasure? Not for his pleasure. It was perhaps

a matter of some business? Perhaps. Was this my lady's maid who was with her? It was. Perhaps the maid's name was Jane? Perhaps it wasn't. Maybe it was Sophia? Maybe it was, but he had always known her as Cora. Ah! Happy thought! Was it possible that this splendid upstanding young woman might be by any chance his wife? The Deity was called upon to witness his grateful denial. Was my lady possibly a certain fabulous Miss Simpkins of Chestnut Grove? Not that he knew of. Was he reasonably certain she was not? He thought he was. Had he ever seen her before this particular journey? Every day for many weeks. Of course he knew her name then? A nod. It was doubtless a well-known name? A nod. Well known, that is, in the parts whence they came? A nod. Not likely to be known hereabout? Couldn't say. How was the best way to address the lady? Didn't quite understand. What did he call her? "My Lady." Was I supposed to call her "My Lady" also? I wasn't supposed to call her anything. But if she should speak to me? She wouldn't. Did my lady stop at The Silver Ship because she was tired after her hours in the saddle? Most likely. Where had they stopped for their midday meal? Nowhere. When had they started on the journey? He had not observed the clock. To-day? Yes. The horses did not suggest that they

had been pushed hard or far? They were fine horses. Particularly the bay? Particularly the bay.

I was rather annoyed at getting around to the cattle again, and was trying to contrive some new method of attack, when Peg advised me, under the subterfuge of more ale, that Uncle Dickon was wanting to see me under the stairs.

I found him in the back hall, awaiting me with an expression which was nothing short of roguish. Before he could tell me of his desires he was compelled to chuckle till he choked, to jab at my ribs with a fat, stubby thumb, and to leer at me, all in a manner which would have startled me considerably if I had known him less well where ladies were concerned. Eventually he found words: and was I not the sly one, bless his days; and was I not the cozener, split him sidewise; and he would be burned for a wizard if the great lady in the best parlor had not sent straightway for the landlord, and on his responding to the summons might his ears be clipped if she had not cried him out for the very devil himself, and she would have the handsome young gentleman for a private word. And he chuckled again; and choked and jabbed and leered again; and I hastened to the great lady's room with some misgivings as to my appearance in leathern breeches, and a hope that my requisition had been received

by my Uncle Dickon with greater tact and delicacy than it had been delivered to me.

I knocked, and perforce must wait, at a word from the maid Cora; so I kicked my shins in the dark hallway, and smoothed back my hair with nature's comb—and in a little the maid's voice bade me enter and close the door behind me.

The room, I discovered, was brightly illuminated by two candelabra set at each side of a small table which had been drawn from its place in the corner to the very centre of the apartment. Sitting behind this, and leaning forward facing the door with her elbows on the table-top, was the great lady of the cloak, hat and mask—all three now cast aside. She was smiling upon me as I entered, with a look which was partly a welcome and partly an entreaty, and wholly so sweet and tender and entrancing that I quite failed to take heed of the maid in the shadows or her request regarding the door, which would have been open yet had she not kicked it closed behind me, the jar spoiling one of my very best bows.

Although far from Uncle Dickon's portrait of himself at my age, I was still pretty well at ease with the ladies; but with all her charming condescension there was a dignity and an aloofness about this beautiful creature which makes the title of Great Lady spring to my mind whenever

I think upon her. Her hair was so dark that it blended into the shadows behind her, while wayward curls nestled upon her brow and fair cheeks and neck in picturesque confusion. Her dark gray eyes moved very quickly and nervously under narrow arched brows, looking frankly and fearlessly into yours for a moment, and then, usually, turning away without displeasure but without personal interest to some object which might attract her more. With her but few people counted in the sum of things; but at the moment of our first real meeting I was, fortunately, one of these. She held out her hands to me, as though she was greeting a near and dear companion, but I hesitated to touch them. I thought, at first, that she had made a mistake as to my identity.

"The old landlord tells me," she said, "that you are a relative of his, newly come to The Silver Ship. Did I understand him correctly?"

Her voice was so clear and crisp, like one accustomed to command—yet modulating to her will as though she sang instead of spoke.

"I have been here but a fortnight," I told her.

"What may I call you?" The question set me to wondering for a moment, but I had no reason to withhold my name.

"Basil Myles," I told her, and watched her face, but she seemed not at all disquieted that it must be unfamiliar to her. After a pause, during which

she never once withdrew her eyes from my face although I tried hard to match her, look for look:

“ You have a brother at sea, have you not? ”

“ I have.”

“ I knew it! ” she murmured, evidently to herself, and her eyes flashed with pleasurable excitement. “ By what name do you call him? ”

“ Roger,” I said, and was much surprised when she tilted her head and laughed very merrily at my reply. I saw nothing funny about it, myself, and for a moment thought perhaps this was some mummery or jest upon me, and looked hastily about the room to note if but she and the maid were there. Seeing this, she reached forward suddenly and took my dangling hand in both of hers, holding it close while she questioned me again.

“ Basil,” said she, her voice so soft and tender, “ when did you last talk with this same brother of yours? ”

I thought as well as I might for the near, dear presence of her—I fear I am an exceptionally impressionable youth where beauty is concerned.

“ It was more than two years now, my lady.”

“ But surely you have heard from him since? ”

“ By letter-packet, yes.”

“ Did he say aught of a marriage? ”

“ Of marriage! Roger! Nay. He is still to be wed, I’ll swear.”

“ He is,” she said, with a color flushing in her

cheeks but her eyes steadily upon mine like a challenge. "He is—and to me!"

Love does not come unto a man as quickly as that, I feel certain; and yet her thus telling of my brother's good fortune was like a buffet in the face. I think my hand went cold in hers for our clasp severed, yet she was too deep in her own happiness to take heed of me, I know. It was not jealousy which welled suddenly within me when I learned she had promised herself to another. It was not, then, that I coveted his success—envied his fair fortune. Not then! It was more, I told myself, that in hearing this confession she had thus snapped to, with a crash which shook me I admitted, a secret door which had evidently been opening upon a pretty romance of my own dreaming. One of the first thoughts which flashed in my mind was the wry avowal I must carry to Uncle Dickon after all his nudging and chuckling: "She is my brother's betrothed." And 'though I was spared that—well! so runs the world; and she was talking of him, and how we looked so much alike that she knew me all in an instant, although wanting the knowledge that I was at The Silver Ship—or in the world at all, for that matter. I was not certain then of all she said although my gaze never left her sweet curved lips while she was speaking, but soon I heard how none knew of their plighted

vows except her faithful maid, and her dear, dear sister, and now her faithful brother-to-be. I saw no reason why the whole world should not know it if they were to marry—had I won such I would have shouted it from the housetops—but the story of love, I suppose, must ever be whispered, not sung aloud, lest it lose its melody in the hubbub of temporal sounds. Thus, for some purpose I could not fathom, I must say naught to a soul—even my aunt and uncle.

Then came almost a greater surprise, for she told me that my brother was coming here to *The Silver Ship* to see her. This visit might be several days or weeks away, of course depending upon the winds and tides; and while she could not await his arrival she was about to intrust to my keeping a token of her love for him when he arrived—and would I suggest what it might be?

By now I had gotten hold upon myself to answer; and made so bold as to say that, were I so fortunate as to receive a like token from one as lovely (supposing that the whole world held such another, at which she blushed and smiled upon me), I could choose nothing so fair and yet so precious as a shining curl; at which she blushed more sweetly still, and vowed that I was more forward than my brother. Not displeased, however, she took shears from the maid and cut

away from her thick cluster of curls a long tress, and then removing a ring from her finger she tied the strand upon it, and handed both to me.

"He will come soon," she said; "and you will give this to him—my betrothed. Tell him that I have never loved him as now I do in this hour of his ordeal. Tell him that death alone will keep me from him. Nay! Say not the word *death*! It is an evil omen to couple it with love. Say only that I live but to see him, and will so arrange; perhaps, who knows, by your kind help, before he leaves this inn. Be of what assistance to him you can—for my sake, my brother-to-be. When I came here to-day I merely slipped away that I might look upon the house which soon will shelter all that I hold dear. God bless you, Basil. You have a ready wit and a subtle tongue. Use them both in his favor."

"I will not fail you," I said. "Although much you tell me needs an index for my slow wit you praise so highly."

"Do not forget the ring! "

I looked down upon my palm, first at the sable curl and then at the golden circlet to which it so affectionately clung. It was a plain gold band with a seal of a unicorn's head upon the facet, and a motto cut upon the band: *Auctor pretiosa facit*. I read, and smiled.

"Have no fear that I will overlook the ring. I could scarcely forget with so appropriate an inscription upon it."

She smiled, and bowed her acknowledgment. "Farewell for the present, Basil. Watch over my dear love. You can do much to aid us in our secret marriage."

I bent and kissed her hand. The maid Cora, whose presence I had entirely forgotten, opened the door behind me, and I backed out into the hall with my eyes intent upon the lovely face framed by the black curls. The door was promptly shut, and I turned about, and banged into a figure in the unlit passage which proved to be none other than Uncle Dickon whose curiosity had brought him to the door. We walked to the ordinary together.

"I did not see her without her mask, Basil. Tell me, is she a fair wench?"

"Glorious!" said I.

"You'll tell your old uncle for what you were wanted, eh, Basil?"

"Why, for nothing of interest," I lied, when there was a tinkling of gold upon the flag floor, and the landlord stooped quickly to restore to me the ring and the ringlet. For only a second he stood with puckered brows, and then with a chuckle his stubby thumb found a lodgment in my ribs.

"I fear, Uncle Dickon," said I, "that I am a gay dog indeed."

And Uncle Dickon choked, and said he'd be drowned in his own ale if he doubted it.

CHAPTER III

TELLING OF THE VISIT OF THE PEDDLER, THE THIEF-TAKER, AND THE THREE SAILORS

No sooner had the sound of her horse's hoofs died away upon the soft earth of the inn road than I was in a torment of wonder and curiosity which could only be assuaged from the lips of the Great Lady herself. To begin with, I had never the wit to learn from her her name, or the place where she lived, or where I might communicate with her. Except for the grudging replies of her serving-man I had really learned nothing—and yet in one sense I had learned so much from her confession of love.

Then another question sprang up to plague me; and another after that. Where had she met my brother? He had not been in our American Colonies for over two years that I knew. Then, too, there was an ordeal through which he was passing. At the moment I had thought she referred to their temporary separation, but did she? Again, why should they keep their betrothal so secret that even my father must not know? And why was Roger coming here (to The Silver Ship, of all places!), instead of to his own home—or possibly to hers?

I had a fairly vivid imagination in my youth, and I did not spare it now—nor did it spare me. I think I worked out, almost subconsciously, a score of hypotheses to fit the few facts I knew; discarding each in turn to clutch upon the next. Uncle Dickon would not have been of much assistance to me, but had I been free to do so, I would have gone to Aunt Tulip as a confidant. My father would also have been told—and perhaps could have enlightened me much upon the matter—but that was also forbidden. It seemed that my only solution was Roger's prompt arrival and timely explanation; yet a week passed and he did not come.

I have said that true love could not come upon a man with such a suddenness as in my short glimpse of this shadowy-haired mystery maid; but something strangely akin to it grew with my thinking upon her, which I did most of my waking hours. I found myself turning at each lift of the latch with my heart in my eyes, hoping she had returned. At dawn in the floating mist I seemed to see her slim form riding toward me from out the forest border. When the birds sang I knew again the music of her voice. Each night a score of times I started up, thinking the fall of ash beneath the fire was the thud of her mare's hoof upon the turf, or perhaps the whispering of the autumn wind about the shuttered casements

was her call to me to walk with her beneath the star-strewn night. The murmur of the bubbling spring told me of her, and the sweet-scented breeze of the wood. She dwelt with the Naiads in the river's tide, her laughter gurgling as the rapids swirled; and in her dear name—more precious far to me because it was unknown—Hrim-thursar wrote me cryptic messages upon the window-pane. The leaves of the trees purled of her in the dusk, and when I wandered in the meadows the reeds rustling in the soft air seemed to speak to me of her enchantment. Perhaps they were merely comparing the length of my ears with those of Midas, I do not know; but well they might, for was she not promised, and by her own sweet will, to another? And here was I, bearing around in my keeping her love-token to my brother—and sighing like a smith's bellows for but a glimpse of her.

It seemed like a month to me since her visit, although it was but a short half week, when I heard the familiar "Ho! Burlington, ho!" and in came Peter the Peddler at the door of The Silver Ship, with a letter from my father to me, and the general news of the city for all who would care to learn. My father's correspondence was in no manner important except in testifying to his continued good health. I had hoped that there might be some mention made of my brother

Roger's return, or at least a hint of the likelihood of such an event, but such was not the case. Evidently he was more in the dark than I was regarding this matrimonial adventure—which was the equivalent of knowing nothing at all. I sat in the window-seat, letter in hand, and fell to dreaming on the matter, when I was recalled to myself by a conversation between the peddler and my uncle, as they stood at the short counter near by. Peter, it would seem, had produced from his pack a good-sized gayly printed handbill, and the contents of this was the subject of their discussion. Now the peddler, I knew, was unable to tell one letter of the alphabet from another; and Uncle Dickon could not decipher a line of his Bible without Aunt Tulip at his elbow; so I watched with some curiosity, knowing that both were sensitive of their illiteracy.

“So you were told to place it in all public houses and places of general gathering, eh?” asked Uncle Dickon.

“And little wonder, seeing as to what it says,” replied the peddler.

Uncle Dickon looked upon the bill with his head on one side and his mouth pursed in weighty consideration. “Very true,” he said. “Very right and true, I should say.”

“I was also to get the bellman at Burlington to cry it eight times in the town,” said the ped-

dlar, opening his eyes very wide and nodding vigorously.

"Eight times!" cried the landlord. "Well, bake me with my own bread, but that's a matter of some importance, I must say. Just what did the bellman make of it, now, Peter?"

"Why, I ain't been to him yet, coming first here with Master Basil's letter," he explained. "But it's all wrote out plain on this here paper for all as can to read."

"Bless me, and so it is," said my uncle, looking it over with the eyes of the discriminate. "True for you, Peter, and so it is. Yes, sir, it's, in the way of speaking, as sweet and pretty a print as ever I would wish to read of. Let's see. What does it tell us, now? Well, well!"—and he traced the lines down slowly with his pudgy finger—"Tut, tut! Would heart of man believe it? What's this right here now? God bless my soul! Well, this is in the nature of a surprise, so to speak! Hum—yes. Just as I thought. I'll fix it here to hang on the shelf where all can see who desire, Peter. I'm obliged for calling my attention to it. Now, what other news from down the river?"

I rose, and leaning over the counter, read the following notice:

IN THE NAME OF THE KING

And those vested with the proper authority in
the City of PHILADELPHIA of the PROVINCE
of PENNSYLVANIA, to whom this may come

GREETINGS :

IT IS HEREBY DECLARED TO ALL
TRUE MEN

that a reward is set aside
of
£150

OF ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY POUNDS STERLING

To be paid for the capture and return to the
above authorities of the person, dead or alive, of

JONATHAN (GEORGE) LAMBERTINE

late master of the brigantine *Merry Christmas*.
Wanted for PIRACY upon the high seas, and upon
the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays.

DESCRIPTION

Age (say)	30 yrs.	Height (say)	six ft.
Weight	14 stn.	Color	white
Hair	dr. brown	Eyes	dark
Features	regular	Marks	no brands

Assumes the manner and appearance of a
gentleman. A very deadly swordsman, or with
the pistols.

HIS PERSON

DEAD OR ALIVE

£150 Sterling

“There,” said I, when I had finished my perusal
of the “sweet and pretty print,” “is a fine op-
portunity for Peter here to retire on a goodly

pittance. What would you say to one hundred and fifty pounds, Peter? ”

“ Scotch? ” he grinned.

“ No, sterling.”

He grinned further and shuffled his feet. “ I get a penny for each bill I sets in a proper place and sixpence the cry in Burlington. That’s the nearest I’ll come to the fortune. What must you be doing of to get the gold? Kill off the Frenchies, or push back the ocean, I suppose.”

“ No. Simply capture a water pirate who has taken to the land, and carry him back on your shallop to Philadelphia.”

“ You catch him, and tie him up tight, and I’ll carry him down safe enough,” he drolled. “ What might the fellow’s name be, Master Basil? ”

“ Either Jonathan or George Lambertine, they don’t seem to be certain which. Ever hear of him on the river? ”

“ Lambertine? Can’t say as I ever have. There ain’t been no Lambertines in my day. Was there good news in the letter I brung you? I’m glad of that, now. I don’t like being the bearer of poor tidings. I see you’ve got your logs ablaze already, landlord. It cools here quicker than it does in the city, I believe. No, not another drop, thank’ee. I must make Burlington afoot, and get the bellman started or lose my pay. Lambertine, eh? No, I never heard tell of him. But I’ll keep

my ears open, and if I happen to learn where he's hiding I'll call back, Master Basil, and we can go a-hunting together. Lambertine? No. It don't make no mention of his ship, do it?"

"Yes, somewhere here. Let's see. Here we are: 'late master of the brigantine *Merry Christmas*'!"

"The ——! The *Merry Chris* ——! No, I can't say as I ever heard of that name before. The *Merry Christmas*, eh? Say, landlord, if it's all the same to you I think as how I'll have a second mug of that ale here by the fire before I go. As I was saying, it cools quicker here than in the city, I believe, and I'm in the way of a bit of a chill right now, I think."

Peter the Peddler sat warming his ale at the hob; and presently, when the wants of some new arrivals had been seen to, I looked about for him, and he had gone upon his way. The fire before which he had sat, and which was burning brightly during his stay, was now but a smouldering ember, so I thought it wise to stir it a bit and throw on a log or two. As I scraped away the ashes from the hearth I found it filled with the cinders of burnt paper. Without a thought I wielded the besom and tongs until the black fluttering ash had flown, with the draught, up the chimney, and in so doing I caught, in the light of the new-kindled wood, a word or two on a scorched paper-

end, which set me thinking again. For the words were *£150 Sterling*.

It may have been that week-end that a man, a stranger to me, slipped quietly into the tap at dusk, and asked leave to speak with Master Tremaine. He was a great, thick-set fellow with narrowed eyes and a noiseless tread, and I liked his looks so little that I sent Peg for the landlord while I kept him under my eye. Uncle Dickon hailed him as an acquaintance, however, and must have me over in a moment to be made known too. He was a certain Jacob Plimmer, from my home city, and I found his conversation—what there was of it, for he proved far from a wordy man—easier to listen to than was his face to look at. He had come to us on business, it seemed, and he was as prompt as common courtesy would allow in getting down to it.

“Master Tremaine,” said Master Plimmer, “I see as how you has a bill here *re-garding* Cap-Lambertine. How ’ja come by it, may I ast?”

“This bill?” said Uncle Dickon, pointing to the sweet and pretty print.

“Certainly! You got but one here.”

“Why, I ain’t exactly certain just how that came here,” answered the landlord, pushing back his ginger wig and scratching his brow to stimulate recollection.

“You don’t remember, eh?” said his inquisitor,

with an accent in which sarcasm predominated. "Well, that's odd, now."

"Now, Jacob, don't be saying something that you might regret ——" But Master Plimmer wagged his finger menacingly across the counter.

"Don't forget, Dick Tremaine, that I represent the law, now. Don't forget that!"

"I've commit no crime," said Uncle Dickon meekly.

"Then where 'ja get the bill?"

"It was given to me by Peddling Peter."

"Huh! That's odd," commented friend Jacob.

"It may be odd, and again it may be even," retorted Uncle Dickon, stung to the showing of some heat. "The main point is that it's true. My nephew, here, a fine truthful young man, who wouldn't lie for anybody or anything, will swear a oath to that, won't you, Basil?"

"Nevertheless," said Master Plimmer, who seemed singularly unimpressed with the veracious character given me, "nevertheless I say that it's odd, and I sticks to it. And as you mean well, I know, I'll let you in on *why* I says odd."

"Well, why?" asked Uncle Dickon gloomily.

"Because this here Peddling Peter claims that he lost every dod-blessed one o' them bills overboard of his boat the day as he was bringing them up."

"Perhaps this was just one loose one that he

happened to save," suggested the landlord, who was for always getting out the easiest way.

"Perhaps," repeated Master Plimmer, but without conviction. "Anyway, that ain't no excuse for him leaving the second lot on the wharf this A. M., and causing me a special trip up, is it?"

My uncle could not just say as how it was. As for me, I said nothing. Master Plimmer took one more gin upon the rest, and departed with his package of posters. Without his red vest I might not have recognized him as a thief-taker, but in any garb I would have known immediately that he had to do with the vicious and the sinful and the lecherous. There is some sort of an adage that physicians are responsible for most of the diseases. I personally think that Master Plimmer and his ilk are responsible for a great deal of crime.

To make a finish of the handbill matter, I learned later that there was some sort of an investigation into their loss, and it so turned out that the suggestion which Uncle Dickon had offered about ours being the only bill saved was quite true. It would seem, from what Peter the Peddler told to the authorities, that he had taken out one bill from the bundle to read what it was all about, and while looking it over the rest had fallen into the river, leaving but this one in his

hand. Forgetting the second package on the wharf was simply an oversight which might happen to anyone. Of course it struck me as odd when I heard it, that Peter had taken a bill to read, for that was something I knew he could not do. But, on the other hand, his testimony might well have been misquoted to me, for I got it through a very unreliable source. Peter the Peddler told me, in fact.

On an afternoon shortly after this investigation, three men of undoubted seafaring proclivities supped in the corner of the ordinary of The Silver Ship. They were quiet in demeanor, and as peaceable in appearance as tarred ringlets, golden earrings, hairy chests and rolling gaits would allow. Whence they came and whither they went I do not know. They spoke in hoarse whispers among themselves—not always in honest English, either—ate much, drank more, and paid well and politely. Even Peg, who disliked sailors, was satisfied with their deportment. On passing out one of the trio sighted the handbill fluttering from the shelf. They immediately stopped before it, evidently in earnest conversation, and ordering from Peg one last drink, they leaned their elbows on the counter and their heads close together to talk it over.

When they had finished their liquor and their whispering, for it was most secretly they spoke,

one of them turned to me, with a tug at his forelock in way of a salute.

"Master Innkeeper," said he, "you might as well stow that there notice on the shelf. The man that's spoke of there is long caught now."

"What! Lambertine caught?" I cried.

"He is, for certain," said my informant. "So you can haul down the bill."

I thanked him for the information, and when Uncle Dickon came by I told him of the capture of the pirate. For some reason, however—possibly because it was the only one saved of all its brethren from a watery grave—he laid it by in a drawer of the dresser; and at odd moments he would bring it forth with a pretense of careful perusal, and purse his lips and shake his head over the possible recipient of such a large reward.

CHAPTER IV

TELLING OF THE VISIT OF THE CAPTAIN; AND OF THE MAID JOAN

Now a fortnight had passed and no word as to my brother, nor did I catch so much as a glimpse of his fair betrothed, although if there had been aught in the wishing of it she would have come to me but for the thinking of her so constantly. I thought of her by day, and I dreamt of her by night. The light of the breaking dawn carried her smile to me; with Daphne she whispered from the laurel; and in the night the starlit skies flashed back to me in myriad the splendor of her glances. Each day I rose with the hope that some message might come from her, each dusk I went disconsolate to my rest. No hour passed that I drew not forth from my breast her shining sable curl, which clung no closer 'round its golden ring than it clung about my heart. And as thus I languished, there came to The Silver Ship another guest of whom I must tell you.

On one particular evening as I sat chatting with some of the earliest of the arrived coterie, the green door of the inn was thrown open

with unusual energy, and in there strode a traveller upon whom all eyes were turned with one accord. He was a great broad fellow, with a long cloak and a longer sword; and with a voice which, while not necessarily loud, still filled the public room with the cadence of his speech. As he entered he flashed a smile upon one and all gathered about, and yet the eyes above the curved lips were keen to overlook nothing, for he picked me from the group without hesitation and was toward me, one gauntleted hand on hilt, the other making much of the thin Spanish mustachios with which—above a short pointed beard—his face was decorated.

“Ho, Boniface!” he cried, quickly drawing forth and tossing in the air a coin which flashed bright in the candle’s glow. “Do you catch the sparkle of this little nugget? I’ll pledge the whole of it for a clean bed, well-seasoned food, and good strong liquor for a week, if—*Sangdieu!*—I can also get a kiss a day from the prettiest wench behind the bar! By the corpse of Bacchus, don’t keep me waiting on the threshold! Here is the gold, and do I leave it here or elsewhere? Yes—or no?”

He was a great fellow, I have said, and yet his step was quick and springy, and his long nether limbs—encased in soft leathern boots—lithe and sinewy; his chest deep, and the neck which bore

his head so proudly sprang up from his breadth of shoulder like the lusty trunk of a tree. The smile which he wore on his entrance—and which curved his lips from his white teeth at the slightest provocation—was a trifle self-sufficient perhaps, but it never became fatuous. And if he wore the half of it because he found himself so affable the remainder was a tribute to the company he shared. His thick brown hair was cut short in the Spanish fashion also, and swept back from a broad, studious forehead. His brows were arched when he smiled, but in repose they were apt to settle into a pensive scowl which encouraged vertical creases in his forehead's centre. His eyes,—his eyes alone and naught else about him—suggested youth departing; for they were eyes narrowed by thought, the crow's-feet indelibly stamped at the corners, and lined about; eyes which were aged, not so much by years, as by their peering, peering into the mirror of prophecy as a mariner peers from the bow of his tossing bark into the Stygian night.

By now I had gotten to understand the handling of these bold blades, and I answered him sharply, although I wore a smile which matched in its breadth his own.

“I'm not the landlord here, but I can speak for him well enough, so here's your answer: Put up your gold and sample the bed, the board, and the

liquor. If it suits your taste, all three, and you suit ours, we'll gladly change your gold to silver and from that you may pay us a fair dole. Now, as for Peg, the barmaid here, her kisses go to whom she chooses; and none will force them from her while I am by, be the measure of his sword just twice the length of yours."

I stepped forward a little as I spoke and watched my gentleman closely, for you can never be certain just what one of this gentry will say or do in reply. I think he hesitated for a moment himself, and then with quick, nervous movements he tossed on a side-table his long cloak, followed hastily by his belted sword and scabbard, a wallet which jingled as it fell, his gauntlets, a knapsack of clothing, and crowned the heap with his jaunty plumed beaver. Spinning again the coin in the air, in three strides he was across to the tap before Peggie, and he brought the gold down upon the counter she tended with a bang.

"By all the bells of hell!" he cried, "but this is the place for me! A man am I, and plain speaking is the music that I love. Write me down for the best that you have, my landlord's 'prentice; and as for the girl here, she need have no fear of me, for I am a respecter of all virtue in women and principle in men, both of which flourish, I see, with exceptional vigor at the sign of The Silver Ship."

"May I inquire your name, sir?" said I, a trifle staggered by his sudden turn.

"I give it with pride, sir," he responded, "and I give it with pleasure. It is one you'll not forget, my good friend, for it has made you laugh and it has made you cry ere now, doubtless. It is a name which has proved itself for many years a good friend to true men, and a curse to the weakling. It's Rumm, sir! Captain Rumm! And if you and the company with you will be so kind as to join me, I'll pledge you to it, in it, with it, and by it! Yet but these four drinks will I take withal, for I have sworn an oath to *Saint Yves le Veridique* that I will ever be master of my own good name!"

Peg filled the glasses as those in the room came forward for their share of the stranger's hospitality, bowing, scraping, knuckling their foreheads, and murmuring their thanks; while he, the handsome fellow, lolled gracefully against the counter and acknowledged their gramercy as a king might tolerate the homage of his vassals. Also, when it came to the settlement of the charges there was but one way he would have it, and willy-nilly, the first gold piece he had thrown upon the counter was to go for Peggie against her wedding dower, and another like it was broken to pay.

Thus came to us the gallant, handsome, swash-buckling Captain Rumm. Whence he came, or

why he tarried at The Silver Ship, none knew, nor was likely to ask. I think, as time went by, that none grew as near to him as did I, but to attempt to discover about his concerns other than that which he volunteered would have been simply to court a curt reply, to be fed on a mesh of suave fabrications, or to peer along his shining sword-blade, as the humor found him; for he was theatrical enough at times, very decided in argument, slow to genuine anger but quick enough to draw, somewhat domineering in his bearing toward the rustics about the inn, yet gentle, and very lovable withal. There were times when Uncle Dickon tapped his nose and shook his head over the source of the Captain's gold, but each few days, when I summed up the amount owed, I had no sooner pointed to the green shutter whereon his account was chalked than out popped more pieces-of-eight; and Uncle Dickon tried them with his teeth and listened to their ring on the stones of the hearth—and finding they were unalloyed he would drop them into his corpulent purse and tap his nose again.

Within three days of his arrival he had made himself as much at home as though the tavern had been built for Captain Rumm alone. In the company of Uncle Dickon he matched him chuckle for chuckle and nudge for nudge. In the evening circle he was cheerfully welcomed and

proved himself a good listener, yet bandied lie for lie when called upon to speak. With Aunt Tulip he must have recognized the de Bournonville strain for he swept the floor with his rakish beaver, and ever did her the most devout homage. In short, he captured high and low with his highly-colored personality—roaring his appreciation of the stories of the landlord's hectic past; strolling in the flower-garden with his landlady upon his arm while she, dear old soul, enthralled him with a record of her family's glory; tramping the woodlands with me; aiding the cooks to dress the meat and the maids to neat the rooms; mending the fires, welcoming the guests as though he had fallen heir to the inn—helping, encouraging, and praising! Fascinating Captain Rumm! And let me set it down to his everlasting credit, that our pretty fresh-faced barmaid was ever after treated by him as though she was a duchess. His one error was, I believe, that he told Uncle Dickon (wondering aloud one day about the origin of his gold supply, probably,) that *he* was the man who had captured Lambertine.

In a fortnight he was as well known to our frequenters as—well, as the great sign which hung on the post before the door. But then he was one on whom you would naturally look a second time. He made a very fine figure of a man on horseback (he made a very fine figure of a man at

anything he undertook!), but he rode seldom, and then never far from the inn. Walking was more to his taste, and he and I roamed the woods near by many a mile in the cool of the autumn evenings. Thus we grew very close to one another, and yet he really never made me a confidant of his past, or his hopes for the future. He was simply Captain Rumm to me; a courteous, lovable gentleman. I understood, from what he let drop in general conversation, that he had been away in the foreign wars, and to substantiate this his comments were punctuated at times with strange oaths and unfamiliar phrases. We fenced together, he and I, and while I was accorded one of the best thereabout, he was my master, as also was he with powder and ball. At brute strength I think perhaps I had a shade the better of him, but he could sing like a troubadour, and dance like a leaf in the wind, and run and spring and wrestle, too, with all the best in the countryside. He possessed in a very large degree that energetic temperament which would make him in all things the leader, and yet I soon found he was subject to spells of excessive despondency. During these periods of depression he kept to his room, or if the weather was to his liking, took to the forest alone. Not knowing that this was his habit I several times, when he was first with us, followed him thither, to see him prone upon some

shadowed bank, his face hidden in his hands and his form tense or trembling with emotion. On these occasions I crept away unobserved. At other times I would hear his footsteps as he paced the narrow limits of his chamber the night through. But following this sleeplessness he would appear at breakfast, haggard but smiling; and he never referred in any way to the fact or the cause of his dejection.

I think the Captain was a good judge of character, too, for once he questioned me pointblank as to my belief in the adventures related by the old landlord. I was compelled to make reply that my personal knowledge of Uncle Dickon, coupled with the reputation he had always borne at our home, bade me believe that he was simply lying prodigiously, and that these episodes bore not the slightest relation to the truth.

"But where did he learn these stories?" asked the Captain.

"I have often wondered. I know he cannot read one single word of print."

"So I understand. Well, there is no use in our publishing our doubts, for some of his exploits have become traditional in the countryside by now. Nevertheless, it will take stronger proof than his mere word—splendid old fellow that he is!—before I can swallow them."

We were of one mind, then, but before many

days had gone I was in possession of that very proof; and I pressed for no conviction when it was in my keeping, for the evidence involved the peace and happiness of too many near and dear to me.

One bright early morning, while I lounged musingly on the bench before the door—and Uncle Dickon, leaving me and Aunt Tulip in sole charge, had gone with most of the others to our annual apple-pressing in the orchard—I was startled from a drowse with the fixed impression that my long-dreamed-of-hope had at last matured. For there before me stood a maid who appeared to my sleep-ridden eyes as none other than the Great Lady of my heart. As I shook my head and looked again the vision dissolved into the trim figure of a serving-lass with a white cap over her sleeked black hair, and a letter peeping from a pocket of her apron.

For just a moment longer, so loath is hope to die, I thought it still might be from her, and addressed to her “faithful brother-to-be”; but, alas! “Master Richard Tremaine” was superscribed clearly upon the cover. After finding that the bearer would prefer to await his being fetched rather than deliver the note to my keeping for him, I saw her seated comfortably upon the leaf-protected bench beneath the buttonwood, and went in search of the intended recipient.

Unwilling as he was to come away from the directing of the press, he trotted along at my side with his usual cheerful agility. His wig he carried in his hand, to put on his head as he sighted the house, for he was properly fastidious even before the servants; but so eager was he to return to the field that he scarcely spared breath enough from his haste to affirm that he'd be smothered in his own linen if the interruption was not most inopportune.

On our arrival the letter-bearer—who gave the general impression of a personal and personable maid in some well-to-do family—expressed a desire that the letter be read indoors, so we ushered her into the tap, which was fortunately empty at such an early hour, and while I set about casting up some accounts at a table near by, Aunt Tulip broke the seal of the packet. Unfortunately Uncle Dickon's correspondence could not be regarded, even by the most fastidious, as being in any way private, owing to his regrettable illiteracy.

It will be long ere I forget this scene, impressed as it is upon my memory through the significance it held for the four thus gathered together. To one the short letter bore a deep and touching tragedy, a message which might, in a less noble and endearing personality, have severed the companionship of years, and broken the trust these

years had closely welded. To one it bore, if a staggering and an appalling blow from out the past, at least an opportunity to partly right a wrong—though wrongs of any kind are hard to right when once they have been committed. To one it brought shame—a shame which nothing can erase or mitigate, an ominous branding of the soul awaiting the helpless stranger at Life's very gate, and shrouding it to Life's close in seering odium. To me, although untouched directly by its contents, the letter carried a message of both sorrow and reflection.

Aunt Tulip Tremaine sat by the window and read. Against the crisp autumn sunlight without her sweet weazen profile beneath the starched cap was cut as distinct as the face of a cameo. Directly opposite her, so that he could get the full value of each word she read, sat her husband, his ginger-colored wig now adjusted, and his round face even more rubicund than usual after his exertion in arriving at the interview. Further in the shadow, although not so far but that the sunbeams from the window sought the curve of the youthful cheek and lurked in the blue-black masses of her smoothly knotted hair, sat the maid. I was on a form further toward the chimney-place, but no word of the letter escaped me. It ran, as well as I can remember, like this:

To

MASTER RICHARD TREMAINE,
of The Silver Ship Tavern.
Near Burlington.

Sir:—

From a bed of pain, and from which I shall never more in this flesh rise, I address you through the hand of another, begging you to turn your memory to a season before the birth of this maiden who bears these words to you, and show some pity and heed to the request of a dying woman.

When you came into my life, long since, I trusted you. The time has gone when I can blame aught but myself for my unhappiness, yet now that I am passing to my grave I beg you take provision of this child of ours, nor turn against your flesh and blood as you have turned against me.

If there still remains a spark of charity in your heart for one whom, in years past, you held most fair, let it kindle, I fervently pray, the flame of righteousness, and thus warm your affection for this motherless, fatherless, nameless child—the fruit of our youthful folly.

Upon my knees I beg this, Richard, of your better self.

JEAN.

As she read, the quiet voice of dear Aunt Tulip never faltered. The lovely old face, which I had learned to revere as second only to the unremembered features of my long-dead mother, altered

not a jot. With Uncle Dickon the reverse was truly awsome to one who knew him as did I. His fat face, from being remarkably red, grew gradually remarkably pale. So livid, in fact, that I feared a seizure of some sort might carry him off. His jaw fell and his eyes glazed. The muscles of his great face went slack. He seemed to huddle and shrink, to cower in his chair as though the admonitory finger of Guilt, invisible to all but him, was being vigorously shaken before his evidently astonished nose. Oh, he had loved to talk, had Uncle Dickon! How he had loved to chuckle and prod and leer and lie! But here was a ghost which would not abide in the past, but must needs rise to plague his present, and to curse his future. Poor melancholy Harlequin, your nights of sullied mummery are past! The tales you have told, the stories you have woven, the golden glow of romance which your artistry has ascribed to these adventures is snuffed like a rush-light in the fateful wind wafted o'er the grave of a dead love. The joy has been all in the telling—the proof is as ashes on your trembling lips.

It is the truth, although why I do not know, that we jest at a tale, the reaction of which before us would send us shuddering in flight. It is, perhaps, because we gloss over the details which offend, and build upon the picturesque alone. Thus it is ever; and each small lad must have his

wooden sword, and cut and slash his way to valiant victory through countless enemies, yet never pictures the blood and agony of strife—a lonely death upon the war-scarred field, or shallow graves paving the conqueror's path. We fancy, each of us, ourselves in rôles heroic. The torture of defeat plagues our imagination not at all. It is even true in less valorous byways: thus, who does not laugh as, seated about the board in the evening, someone relates the meandering ventures of a drunken dolt; yet as they speak, if perchance a bleary-eyed dripping-mouth toper lurches by, who draws not away in disgust? Indeed, the joy is all in the telling.

And you have had your moments, Richard Tremaine, before your auditors, such as they were; now, before a dissimilar audience, what character will you play? Dutiful—dominant—forceful—fine? Tender to those who trusted you; honest and manly, yet chastened by the wrong thus brought to light? Alas, no! The finer parts have gone to finer actors. Creep you away, wrapped in your soiled motley, to the shadows.

Aunt Tulip laid the letter down and turned her gentle age-dimmed gaze upon the letter-bearer. She was, as always, with that gracious tenderness and dignity which ever drew you close, yet proved you still unworthy. What, I wondered, were her

thoughts? Was she shocked at this revelation, or had she, too, learned of these stories of the days gone by? Whatever her brief reflection contained of sorrow, bitterness or regret, her composure lent to us all, in some degree, equanimity. Instinctively I realized and appreciated the gulf which lay, in this case at least, between the de Bournonvilles and the Tremaines. Her regard rested upon the innocent girl who sat thus shamed before us; and yet the deep blue eyes of the child—she was scarcely twenty—did not waver from the dear lady's face. Her cheeks and throat grew scarlet, however, and I saw that she hid trembling hands beneath her apron.

“My dear,” said Aunt Tulip, “for many lonely years my husband and I have lived a selfish, weary, childless life. Some weeks ago our nephew Basil, motherless like yourself, came to live for a while with us. We both have learned to love him as our own son. To-day you come to henceforth cheer and brighten our lagging old years. Take off your cap, that I may see you better, my child.”

Mechanically the girl rose from the bench where she sat, and knelt before the slight figure in the great chair by the window. With still quivering fingers she laid aside the linen coif, now no whiter than her face from which the blood had fled; and whether she was beautiful or no I could

not then say, but there was a trembling yet courageous appeal in her attitude which set my heart beating in sympathy.

"What is your name, my child?"

"Joan," whispered the maid.

"'Tis a good name," said the older woman, and she drew close the girl and laid a hesitating hand upon the coils of her black hair. "You are lovely, Joan, and here you must stay to be my very daughter. If you wish it so, your other days, and all pertaining to them, shall be forgotten. Do you so wish?"

"If you please," said Joan, still in a whisper.

"None but we four have heard," said Aunt Tulip, "and we four shall forget."

"Forget ——?"

"Forget everything—except that you shall be known as our niece, just as Basil is known as our nephew. Forget all—except that a new and precious prize has fallen to The Silver Ship."

CHAPTER V

TELLING OF THE VISIT OF THE GREAT LADY'S SERVING-MAN

"THERE was always one thing as I was a-going to ask you of, Dickon," began Master Sills, the chemist, as we all gathered about the chimney a few evenings after the arrival of Joan; "and that was about that there barrel for wine as you hid yourself in the night you was telling us of being near caught with the ——"

"Sh—!" said Uncle Dickon.

"Now you was always a stoutish man," continued the speaker, who was a trifle deaf although unwilling to admit it; "even as a young man you was fleshy, and I was a-thinking it must have been a tight fit for you, so to speak, a-hiding ——"

"Sh—!" warned Uncle Dickon.

"What's wrong?" inquired Master Goodyside, the whitesmith. "What's wrong of Master Sills here asking you a question, landlord? You've told us all a score of times about it, and I've many a time asked myself the same question, being ——"

"Sh—!" hissed Uncle Dickon.

"What's this here hushing up?" asked Sneed,

the barber, in a querulous voice. "Who be you afraid of now? There ain't but us here. For more than a dozen years I've sit here and had my say; and others has had *their* say; and now you is for hushing up. What for, I asks?"

"Talk," answered Uncle Dickon, "about anything you want—except me. Talk about anything you have a mind to, but leave me out."

"Why, I just wanted to find out something at which I had wondered this long time. I was only wanting to ask ——" began the compounder of drugs, but he was cut as short as though the sentence had been severed by his own spatula.

"Don't!" said Uncle Dickon.

"Would you be good enough to tell us, Master Tremaine," asked Squire Dykes, after a blighting pause, "just why Brother Sills here is cut short?"

The landlord thought for a moment or two before replying.

"Why, yes," he said finally. "I'll tell you all, and welcome. Several days ago a niece of mine came to make me and my wife a visit. I want no such tales or talk while she's about The Silver Ship."

"But your niece ain't here now!" argued Master Goodyside. "We ain't a-going to shout about it, are we?"

"No," said Uncle Dickon, with a decision which I had seldom heard him use before. "No, you

ain't going to shout about it, and you ain't going to whisper about it. Likewise you ain't going to talk about me or my past doings at all. That is, not here in my tavern until I say you can. So please understand, and there will be no trouble one way or another."

The outlook for a jolly evening seemed remote. The odd group, scattered about on the chairs and benches fronting the blaze in attitudes of senile comfort, reflectively watched the smoke rise from the bowls of their long clay pipes, and remained silent. I, personally, would have liked to say something to break the tension, but for the life of me I could think of nothing that would fit in with the situation. I winked across at the Captain who sat, pipe in hand, opposite me, and he moistened his throat with a draught of the "Silver Punch" before him, and made an effort to assist.

"This niece of Master Tremaine's," said he, addressing the chemist, "is a very handsome and likely young woman, don't you think, Master Sills?"

Thus directly addressed, Master Sills raised his eyes slowly to the face of the speaker, removed his pipe, spat contemplatively upon the logs, and replied, "I ain't got nothing against her, Cap'n," and resumed his silence.

"She is, I would say, a remarkably fine young girl," said Captain Rumm, in no way daunted by

the faint praise of the chemist. "A really *remarkably* fine young girl. In fact, I was telling Master Tremaine that he was fortunate in having such a charming niece."

"He ain't!" said Master Goodyside.

"He ain't what?" asked the Captain, surprised into the vernacular by the remark.

"He ain't got no such niece!"

Uncle Dickon went pale and flabby.

"Why, who is she if she is not his niece?"

"You can ask the landlord that, if you ain't afraid of being hushed up," said the maker of edge tools, "but no matter what he says, she ain't his niece."

"Come! Come!" said the Captain, "that's a poor way to speak."

"Truth is truth!" Goodyside retorted stubbornly. "There were just two Tremaine boys, Richard here, and old Doctor Tremaine. Richard ain't got no children, and the doctor's only daughter was Basil's mother; wasn't she, Basil?"

"I believe there was another daughter," I began lamely, but the old gossip knew the family as well as I did.

"There was, sure enough. Her name was Athelia, and she died when very young."

"Still, this girl is probably her child," suggested the Captain.

"When I say 'very young' I mean not older than her third year," Goodyside rejoined.

"I think, in that case," said the Captain, "that Athelia may be eliminated as a mother. I suppose the real truth is that the girl is his wife's niece."

"Her name was Muggins, and she was an only child," broke in Squire Dykes. "I remember her father as though I had seen him yesterday. He came over ——"

"Just a moment, Squire," chirped in Master Sills. "We were speaking of just who this here girl might be. Now, I contend that she can't be his niece—no, nor his grandniece, either, because, as you see ——"

"We'll have no talk about my niece here," said the landlord, who had been called away at the beginning of the conversation and had just returned in time to catch the general drift it had taken.

After another pause Sneed, the barber, rose and reached for his muffler. "I'll be going, friends all," he said, and made preparations accordingly. Some of the others might have hesitated to depart so abruptly, but once started none lingered long; and soon, but for a few travellers, the tap of *The Silver Ship* was deserted.

"I did my best," the Captain said, when he joined me later in my apartment. "But evi-

dently I chose the worst possible subject for conversation to-night."

"I don't think it was the subject so much as Sills' persistent questioning which upset my uncle," and feared he might read the lie in my face. Still, I said to myself, there was no good of my raising a doubt in the Captain's mind regarding this new member of our household; and her secret was in no way mine.

"Perhaps you are right," he responded. "And yet I have noted a change in your uncle these last few days. I don't believe he is well. Have you noticed how quiet—and how short-tempered he is?"

"I don't think he is quite himself," was all I could think of to say.

"Several others about the inn have mentioned it to me. Do you think he could really be angry with me for introducing the subject of his niece to-night? He, himself, has talked of far more personal things before these very friends of his, lots of times."

"I would not bother about it," I told him. "Like enough he will have forgotten all about it in the morning."

"I hope so; and yet I blame myself for bringing up a lady's name in a public tavern. Were *you* offended, Basil?"

"I ——?"

"Yes, you?"

"I! Why, no!"

"Perhaps you were interested?"

"Interested?" I turned to face his quiet smile, and waited until he repeated the query.

"Does the subject of your cousin interest you, Basil?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I am very fond of you, my boy—and because your cousin is a very charming girl."

"And you are wondering if I have noticed these fascinating qualities, and have succumbed to them?"

"Yes—if I am not overbold."

"Her attractions must be evident to all; but did you ever hear that confidence begets confidence?"

"Oh," he said quickly, in an offhand way, "if you mean, have I fallen in love with Mistress Joan, let me tell you at once, no. But that does not blind me, in fact it may further open my eyes, to her loveliness."

"Nor do I love her, nor am I blind," I replied. "But, really, that was not just what I meant. I have never asked you of yourself, nor what you did here. I have respected your silence. You now have asked me a question; one easily answered, and yet had things been otherwise as to my feelings, it were very personal. How do you

know that I am free to fall in love and how do I know the same of you?"

He laughed—then paused—and finally laughed again. "Why, you are free enough, Basil. Don't spring a wife and family on me at the age I attempted to force one upon your Aunt Athelia this evening. You are just a boy still, and a pretty poor sort of a boy at that if another week does not find you running about after yon pretty witch as though you were her shadow. As for me, I am as free as the birds, or as any other decided simile you care to employ. Not through choice, Basil. In looking on me you are inspecting the abandoned wreck of a romance."

"Are you joking with me, Captain?"

"I am absolutely serious."

"But you are smiling?"

"No. I am laughing—laughing at the fine fellow I thought I was, until I learned my true value in her eyes. *O ciel!* Such eyes she had!"

"Do you mean to say that a woman had the opportunity to become your wife, and—and ——" I was truly fond of the Captain, and that anyone could resist his charm and swagger seemed unthinkable to my immaturity. He seemed to read my thoughts (he had a trick of guessing my mind before I could express it sometimes,) and he clapped his hands, and sprang up to make me an exaggerated bow, and then to pace and preen and

ruffle across the small chamber; twirling his mustachios and leering at me from the corner of his half-closed iniquitous eyes.

"Bravo! Bravo! Basil, my dear disciple," he cried. "You do more to restore to me my erst-while self-sufficiency than all else combined. In your kind words, and in your tactful hesitation, I see myself in the brave colors each of us would like the world at large to paint him in. You steep me in impregnability. Knowing no weaknesses, you picture none. I have a presentiment that it was you, Saint Michel, who stood within my mirror when I was a youth, and showered forth upon my egotistic self all the perfections that I dreamt were mine. It was you who taught me my appreciation; and now, when the time has arrived that I most need it all to counterbalance Fate's pernicious stroke, you are here again to restore my confidence in Captain Rumm."

"What ever else, you lack not confidence," I laughed.

"Fie!" he cried, stopping across the table from me, and straddling a chair with his arms folded over the back, as was his wont. "Fie! That is no nice remark to make to an elder brother. Let it pass, however, for modesty such as mine thrives most on pert rejoinders. What say you to one little glass of white wine in the pantry, and to bed, Basil?"

"I say, that you are driving hard and far from the subject on which we were speaking, and that I would like to pin you down, if that is possible, to an account ——"

"Name of a name!" he said suddenly, and moved the candle between us so that the light fell upon my face. "*Jesu Maria!* And I never noticed it before! Basil, has anyone ever paid you the deep compliment of suggesting that, were your youthful lip and chin decorated as I wear mine, and your hair clipped short in the same fashion, you would made a devilish pretty man—and very closely resembling myself?"

"I have been told so a score of times."

"Is it possible? And the thought has in no way turned your head?"

"We are of about the same build, also," I laughed.

"True—true. But your carriage lacks that—that —— Really, Basil, you should know more of those quaint and expressive phrases of the French. I cannot explain the difference in our English; I can merely—illustrate it."

"And if I promise to study all your motions, and imitate them to perfection ——"

"Perfection? Perfection is seldom met with in this faulty world."

"But, Captain, if I recognize, and strive to mimic it, will you tell me all of the lady who

drove you here to The Silver Ship to eat out your heart alone?"

His eyes narrowed, and his lips went grim. Then in a moment his brow cleared. "If your carriage lacks a certain air, it at least has the virtue of bearing you straight to the marrow of what you most desire. Omitting the delicate insinuation regarding the progress of fools in realms where angels demur, I suppose there can be no real harm in telling you all there is to the little drama—lest you imagine more than is wise. Let me see! In what words shall I preface my own obit? It was some months ago that I met this lady with whom I fell very wonderfully and desperately in love. We met under rather unusual circumstances, while we were—were—travelling. Some of her family were with her, and—well, you know how people are thrown together while travelling. Her family did not like me. Neither you nor I can understand or appreciate this, but nevertheless they did not,—and I am not certain but that this assisted somewhat my suit. I sometimes think her regard for me really fattened on the opposition, and things seemed to be going so well—when we came to the journey's end. Now, I have, I trust, a respect for the Bard, but he lied when he said that journeys end in lover's meetings. In this case it spelt separation. I was given very plainly to understand that my presence

at her home would—well, would not be tolerated; but we arranged to meet elsewhere, in secret of course; and everything looked to our early marriage. If you have tears, prepare to shed—no! He was wrong before, so why should I quote him now? Anyway, we were not to meet at once. For a time, you see, she would be watched. But on a certain quarter of the moon, and at a certain place, word on the matter was to be got to me, and the hour and spot of this longed-for tryst.”

He paused, and the old scowl gathered between his eyes. He waited, in fact, so long before he spoke that I interrupted with a question.

“And what happened then?” I inquired.

“Why”—and he broke into a smile which did not reach his eyes—“nothing! Simply nothing! She had forgotten me, I suppose, or had found another more to her liking.”

“She might be ill,” I hazarded. “Or she might be watched still, or kept by force away from you.”

“No,” he said. “Although I thank you for the implied compliment, I have heard that she is well, and free to come and go. I think, perhaps, that we both overrate my attractiveness.”

“No woman worthy of you would have acted so!” I cried.

“You would not speak so did you see her.”

“Was she so lovely?”

“I loved her the moment I saw her.”

"But true love could not come so suddenly upon one!" I assured him.

He laughed at me again, then, and sent me into some confusion. "Your heart is ice," he said. "I can see now how even the smiles of your pretty cousin could not move you."

"Was your journey with her long?" I asked.

"Close to a thousand miles."

"Were you with her all the while?"

"Almost."

I wanted to ask him from where they were all travelling, but as he did not volunteer the information I ventured to assist him in that respect.

"Were you coming north here, Captain, when you met?"

"Yes," he said, absently.

"From Virginia perhaps?"

"Virginia? No. It is unhealthy for me in Virginia just now, I think."

"Have you ever been there?"

"I can't recall."

After a pause which he did not seem eager to discontinue, I ventured to suggest that I also was a victim of unrequited passion.

"I know just how you feel, Captain, and can sympathize with you heartily."

"Indeed? How is that?"

"I am also in love. And yet I fear you might laugh at me if I told you of it."

"If you fear anything regarding it, your love is altogether superficial."

"You put me at a disadvantage from the beginning."

"I do not mean to," he assured me. "I have told you honestly all of myself worth knowing, and would be glad to learn of your affairs."

"Well, to put it very briefly, a lovely lady came here to visit at the inn one evening. She asked to speak to me alone for a moment. She was very, very beautiful; and I hoped that she had seen, and been impressed by me. When we were alone, and I would have made love to her, I found that she was betrothed to my brother, Roger—or so she said."

"You did not allow her betrothal to annoy you, I trust?"

"Well, you see she told me that he was coming here to meet her; and that I was to assist in their secret marriage, or something to that effect. But she never came back again, and Roger has never arrived, so I can simply sit and wait."

"And you yourself fell in love with her?"

"Yes."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"You saw her but once?"

"Yes."

"And you loved her to distraction from this short interview?"

"I do indeed!"

"What is her name?"

"That is the main difficulty. I don't know."

"Where does she live?"

"I don't know that either."

"Why did she not tell you these most important details?"

"I—I really don't know."

"What were you to do in the way of assisting at this elopement?"

"I—I—— She didn't say anything very definite."

"When was her betrothed, your brother, to arrive here?"

"I don't know."

He rose, and walked to the further side of the little room. His face was averted, and I think he was making an effort to conceal his amusement; but it was such a joy and a relief just to speak to someone about the Great Lady that I do not think I cared so very much. I waited, before speaking further, until he turned around, however.

"I love her!" I said, stubbornly.

"Let me see if I get this correctly," he said eventually. "You think you have fallen in love——"

"I do not *think*, I ——"

"Just a moment! Let me finish, and argue with me afterwards. You think you have fallen in love with a woman whose name, character, temperament, likes, dislikes, beliefs, disbeliefs, morals, mode, manner and place of living are all unknown to you. I am an older man than ——"

"There! I knew you would not understand!"

"Understand? I understand only too well! I understand that this feeling you dignify by the term of love is merely an infatuation founded entirely upon the slightest—really the most meager—inspection ——"

"Wait!" I interrupted. "I admit that I do not know her name, or just where she lives; but you must give me some credit for recognizing culture and purity and womanly charm even without measuring her to my aunt's social standards."

"Social standards, in the long run, are pretty good things to measure people by, Basil. I would never disparage good blood and good family. The pride of race does much to bolster up courage in men and virtue in women as they go through the world; just as the love of country spurs on the soldier. If you tell a man that he springs from kings he will likely try to scramble back upon the throne; but let him know that he is bred of the gutter, and he will probably feel that no matter

how low he falls, he is at least some improvement on his forefathers. Now you are going to tell me that this enchantress bore all the hall-marks of the patrician. How long did you talk with her? A day?"

"Well—not all of a day."

"Half of a day?"

"I don't know exactly. Quite a while, though."

"An hour?"

"No; scarcely an hour."

"Half an hour, then?"

"Well—even if it wasn't so long—I don't care what you say, Captain! I saw her, and I know I could not be so easily beguiled."

He was laughing his great booming laugh now, and yet, notwithstanding his broken promise, no one could have been angry with him, so sincere and frank was he.

"Why, Basil," he cried, seating himself upon the table-edge before me and holding me off with a hand on each shoulder, to watch my face, "the devil himself could fool Saint Peter for half an hour. Dear boy, a pretty woman could twist you around her finger like—and look you! I say nothing about the lady's virtue, for I know nothing of her, but always remember, if a thief looked like a thief there would be but little opportunity to thieve. Pickpockets seldom go about with a bellman to shout their profession before them,

and horse-stealers are careful not to boast in the cattle-markets of their most successful efforts. Basil, if dishonesty was branded very plainly wherever it abided, we would have little or no difficulty in avoiding the discomfort it engenders. Therefore—beautiful women travelling about stealthily to lonely taverns are not the best people to die of love over.”

“If you think so meanly of my choice,” I responded after a pause, “have you considered that the lady in question was the betrothed of my brother? Perhaps you will allow him the judgment you evidently find lacking in me?”

“Don’t be angry with a friend who is trying to both argue and laugh you out of a foolish infatuation, Basil. Even if she is all you think, she then would be too fine a maid to toss aside your brother for you. That would not hold with her high moral character, now would it? And beside, you are not really in love with her. You are only in love with what you think she is, and would like all women to be. Personally I think she is a schemer of some sort.”

“Then you also doubt my brother Roger’s judgment?”

“She probably never saw your brother Roger. She is fooling you in that, too. Was there any hint of money in her request for assistance?”

“Certainly not!”

"She is probably saving that for her second visit. Were her eyes a heavenly blue, Basil?" And he twisted my face about to make me look into his laughing visage. "Blue eyes are very insnaring, Basil."

"They were gray," I said, sullenly.

"Gray! *Saint Hervé!* They are the worst of all! God give you common sense. Gray, were they? All witches' eyes are gray!"

"Were the eyes of her gray who charmed you in a moment—and left you here to mope and eat your heart away, Captain?"

Our faces were not far apart as we spoke, and as the words left my lips I saw a look creep into his eyes which spelt to me death, if ever I read it in a human face. So appalled was I at the presence of this passion that I sat like a stone before him, while the baleful light rose to a flame, and died again to a spark—and then he was the kindly Captain Rumm again, with his hands still upon my shoulders and his eyes looking into mine. When he broke the silence he did so in a measured tone.

"That subject is one closer to my heart, and closer to my sword, than any other. If my frankness in discussing your love for this doubtless worthy lady has given offense—give me your pardon. If I have erred in putting the matter to you as I see it, the mistake was made in all friend-

ship. Do not overlook that. Do me the justice to tell me that you believe it so."

I took his proffered hand readily, the sooner because I had better gauged the depth of the man's feelings. These sleepless nights of his, and days of black despondency were on account of this lost love, then. He had come here to The Silver Ship, I judged, to hide away and fight his bitter battle out before he faced the world again. Immediately my sympathy went out to him.

"Say no more. I should be really grateful for your well-meant words. I can only plead her beauty for my infatuation. I believe, and always will, that she is as lovely as she is superior in loveliness to all others whom I know. But, as you say, she has promised herself to another, and I must make the best I can of that."

"Let me see," said the Captain, thoughtfully. "Your brother's name must be Roger Myles. Is he, by any chance, an officer in the King's navy?"

"He has had his commission some years."

"Has he been lately serving on the frigate *Success*?"

"He was, the last word I received from him."

"And you tell me that he is coming here shortly?"

"He is, if you can believe this lovely lady."

He reached his hand to me a second time, and

in the excess of his fervor he almost wrung mine off.

"If it is true that Roger Myles comes to The Silver Ship within a fortnight, Basil, I'll creep on my knees to your lovely lady, wherever she may be, and crave her pardon with a gift worthy of a queen. Why, man! If that brother of yours will only answer my prayer and join me here within the necessary time, I'll—I'll ——"

"Do you know my brother?" I cried in amazement.

"Know him! Why, he is carrying my good name, and my honor, and my future happiness—my very life itself—around in his pocket! And I can't reach him! *Morbleu!* If I could but sail out and take them from him!"

"How strange!" I exclaimed. "You and my brother are friends. Dear friends!"

"Yes!" he almost shouted in his excitement. "Dear friends! Warm friends! Close friends!" And suddenly he tore away his shirt from over his knotted torso and pointed to a half dozen wounds—great knife slashes which sickened me to look upon. "See! Do you recognize your brother's handiwork?" he asked. "Do you know his mark when you see it writ in blood? Ah, yes! I know your brother. And I will very patiently await him here at The Silver Ship."

"In God's name, what was your difference?"

"It would be scarcely just to him if I told you but my side," he answered with a smile.

"How did you meet him, then?"

"With a knife as sharp as his!" And he laughed his booming laugh.

"Tell me of your quarrel," I begged. "I have no fear that you will not do him justice. If he is in the wrong perhaps I can right it for you both."

"It is nothing you can right, my boy; and these slits look deeper than they really are. Wait until he comes. Then we will tell you all of the tale together. This much I will say, however, but nothing more if I die for it on the rack: a pair of gray eyes were at the bottom of it all. Beware of gray eyes, Basil."

And he arose laughing, and went to his bed.

My talk with the Captain had netted me more information regarding his affairs than I could have reasonably expected from one so averse to discussing his concerns: but my attempt to gain either sympathy or interest over the breaking of my heart had met with no success whatever. Therefore, like every boy in love, I went to seek a confidant; and I could hit on only my cousin Joan, my new-found relative. Unfortunately for my desire to tell my secret the hour was no longer early, and Aunt Tulip, whom I met in the hall, assured me her niece had long since retired. Mak-

ing the best of my way to the tap, I secured a mug of autumn ale from Peggie, and choosing a dark and retired corner, sat me down to dwell upon my love and the words of advice Captain Rumm had offered regarding her.

Of course the Captain was right, in the usual case. But my case was, I need hardly state, much out of the common. There were wild, foolish fellows (you may find such anywhere) who might readily be tricked into ill-advised amours; but I had seen and spoken with this radiant being, and no love-sick soldier of fortune could cool my ardor with the ominous croakings of his own disillusionment.

I sat in my warm nook and thought, and sipped my ale; and as the gracious brew hummed to my head the tender subject of my reverie gradually stooped from being *the* Great Lady to being *my* Great Lady, and I closed my eyes to see the vision of her more clearly in my waking dream. Indeed, it was a lovely phantom thus come to haunt my heart. I attempted to recall someone who, even remotely, approached her in perfection. This was difficult. Perhaps Joan, my new cousin, came the nearest, and yet the resemblance was scarcely marked. My Great Lady's eyes were quick-roving and gray; Joan's steady and blue. There are many of blue to one pair of gray, I thought. And my Great Lady's hair was glossy, black and curl-

ing; while my cousin's lay smooth under the white cap she customarily wore. There was naturally a certain similarity in their features, for all beautiful women of corresponding type look, to some extent, alike; and it occurred to me that here lay a resemblance much like that between the Captain and myself.

I sat thus musing until it grew late, and I was nodding possibly, when I detected a scraping and scratching noise upon the outside of the tightly-shuttered window at my elbow. None could see within except by raising himself to the small heart-shaped eyelet cut in the blind, and this evidently someone was attempting to do. My first thought was to stand upon my chair, and lifting on high my candle, peer without; but against the glass I could see nothing but my own reflection. Pausing a moment, that sound reason might laugh at any hesitation on the grounds of personal safety, I crossed to the door, the light still in my hand, and stepped forth into the crisp still night.

I had gone no further than let the door fall to behind me, when, blinded to everything but the light I bore, I blundered clumsily against a man, evidently himself surprised and disconcerted by my sudden appearance. He was a great fellow, with a stupid, fatuous attempt at dignity about him even under these circumstances—a char-

acteristic unforgettable, yet difficult to describe—and no sooner had I glimpsed his heavy features and sightless eye than my heart flew to my throat and I cried out softly, for here was none other than the Great Lady's phlegmatic lackey.

"Do you come for me?" I asked eagerly, yet in a sort of awed whisper, fearing that this visitor might turn out to be an apparition born of my dreaming in the chimney corner.

He said nothing, but remained like a great oaf before me, staring with his single orb as though I had risen from the earth, candle in hand, rather than coming from the inn door.

"You have come to me from—her!" I repeated, my voice trembling with ardor, and still he did not speak, though when I would have laid a hand upon his arm he drew back quickly, and a look of fear, almost of terror, crept upon him. Perhaps I did not note that he so shrank from me until I thought over the incident later, but at all events I gave it no weight. Instead I followed him further down the path as he moved away from me, and in a summary sentence bade him stand.

"Have you a note, or a message, for me?"

"I ——" He stood hesitant with his gaze everywhere but upon my face.

"Speak!" I cried angrily. "If you are here for a good purpose, let it be known. If not ——" and I thrust the candle nearer to him that I might

guess at his reluctance to reply. It was then, and not before, that I realized a second form, tall and cloaked to the heel, was just behind him in the shadows.

My eagerness to learn of her made me the more ready tool, but it was the sudden dastardly effort of the servant to pinion my arms, and the swish of the bravo's sword as it left its scabbard, which told me of my danger. As the lackey threw himself upon me the impact of our bodies jarred out the light. To evade his enveloping grasp gave me no concern in the darkness, and a wrestling trick of which I was the master threw him heavily to the ground. It was here that I erred, for while we both stood it was unlikely the swordsman would have attacked in the darkness for fear of spitting his ally rather than the intended victim. As the serving-man fell, however, he gasped out sufficient warning, and lay prone, while the armed assassin—his eyes more accustomed to the dusk than were mine—at once pressed forward to the encounter.

To turn and attempt flight was to court a span of steel between my ribs. My one and only defense was an immediate assault with the heavy brass candlestick which fortunately I still carried. Grasping the top, thereupon, in something of the manner of a mace, I took a stealthful step forward and aimed a powerful but futile blow at a

spot where I believed the villain stood. My bludgeon swished harmlessly through the empty air, unbalancing me with the force I lent to it, and it was merely my good fortune that on my recovery the brass base squarely intercepted a fierce lunge of the sword, and snapped the blade off close to the hilt.

Feeling the jar of the impact, but not realizing the significant import of this Providential intercession, I again rushed forward to deliver a blow, and in so doing tripped over the crouching form of the lackey and measured myself upon the grass. Instantly there occurred a brief but furious *mêlée* in which it seemed incredible that but three men participated. Not aware that the bravo was disarmed, my one effort was to keep the servant's body between me and the expected sword-thrust. Naturally he struggled vigorously, and blows seemed to rain from every direction, evidently generously apportioned between us as we clutched and tore at one another. My candlestick was lost in the darkness, but I had the precarious advantage that each buffet of mine which found its mark scored upon an enemy, while they did damage to their own cause by the fierceness of their misdirected attack. I had fought me to my knees—to my feet—and had hurled the battered body of the trickster back from me into the murk—when through the pounding of my own blood

in my ears I heard the thud of receding footsteps upon the drive toward the highway. Another instant, and the light breeze bore to me the quick rhythm of two galloping horses, which decreased until it merged with the rapid beating of my heart as I rested on the turf. They were gone!

Gone!

Back they rode to the south from which they had crept to do me murder!

At whose instigation had they come?

As I rose my hand touched something cold and chill in the grass. It was the severed blade of the assassin's rapier. I slipped it within my torn shirt that it might lie with her ring and her sable curl, and giddily made for the low green door of The Silver Ship.

CHAPTER VI

TELLING OF HOW I FOUND MY LOVE AT THE SILVER SHIP

I SAID nothing to anyone that night regarding my experience, and managed to make my room without my disheveled condition being noted; but after a night as disturbed and broken as my disposition and years would allow, I sought about for such advice and sympathy as I felt were duly mine.

Under any but these most unusual circumstances my good friend Captain Rumm would have been the first to whom I would have flown. None would have been as quick to discern and advise me regarding any future danger I might meet with, nor would any other be so willing to stand at my side did it come. But, alas! None would so score me for my infatuation for the Great Lady, and claim his valuation of her character vindicated by this cowardly attack.

Aunt Tulip must not be approached either, especially as I had been warned in that memorable interview with the Great Lady that no one was to be told of Roger's and her betrothal; and to this request I had clung with but the one exception of the Captain—he being chosen by me

as the one of all people most disinterested. Since the day when Joan had first come to the inn there seemed a certain difference had come between my sweet old aunt and me, also. Perhaps this was only bred of my imagination, and her added labor and responsibilities now that her husband had altered so; but it would seem that, whereas I had always been the first in all about *The Silver Ship*, it was now the new-found relative who was lauded to the skies. To be sure Joan was charming. How lovely she was I had hesitated to admit to myself even, lest I might prove untrue to her who was absent, but had she been Aunt Tulip's own daughter she could not have praised her more, nor beamed upon her with a deeper affection. In this she was in remarkable contrast to the child's father.

Poor Uncle Dickon! Since that most momentous morning when his wife had read to him that strange yet touching letter from the dying love of long ago, *The Silver Ship* had undergone much alteration in the nature and personality of its proprietor. In fact I doubt if there has ever taken place so drastic a change in a man within so short a period. It was not that he was less courteous or considerate of his friends or his guests, or that he was any less kindly or affectionate toward his family. Indeed I think if anything his regard for his wife increased daily, if such were possible; but

he was transformed in almost every other particular.

Matters about the tavern, in which he formerly took such pride, would have slumped badly had not we all taken hold with renewed interest. He even forgot to taste daily the "Silver Punch," but he placed a bowl of it on the table each night upon the arrival of the accustomed group—and then quietly retired to his own apartment. You can guess that this caused as much, or more, of a stir in that select circle of villagers than did this sudden and unexplainable "hushing up" of its members regarding his heretofore widely heralded exploits; but instead, as I had expected, of disbanding this gathering it seemed to weld them only the more firmly together in their one topic of conversation—which was he. How he occupied himself these many hours alone goodness only knows. He could have done little else but muse upon the past, which under the circumstances I would have thought both valueless and depressing. I know that my aunt never mentioned the letter which Joan had delivered, or brought forward the subject of its contents; so it was neither nagging, nor his family's martyrous attitude which drove him to seclusion. He ate little now, he who was formerly such a hearty trencherman; and he slept less. Often in the dead of night, when all were sound asleep in their beds, he awoke

me with his pacing and prowling about—as though he were searching the queer old inn for his mislaid jollity of other days.

He grew thinner, too, and less active, like one stricken with a lingering illness. His appearance lost what I might call the “bloom” with which I had always associated him, and it often became necessary to speak to him more than once ere he had grasped the drift of your words. I think that he took note of his own decline, although he mentioned it to me but once. I was passing his room one evening perhaps a week or ten days after noticing this gradual alteration in him, when evidently recognizing my footsteps, he opened the door, and bade me enter for a minute. I was glad to do so, and stood waiting that which he had to tell with considerable curiosity; but while it was evident he had something he desired to impart, his difficulty seemed to lie in its proper arrangement, and I must wait some moments before he got to the meat of the matter.

“Basil,” he managed finely, “you have been a great comfort and assistance to both me and your aunt, and I have learned to value your advice highly. I am anxious to get your ideas on a certain subject of importance to me, but I am afraid you will put me aside without a direct reply. Will you?”

"I certainly will tell you the truth if I can, Uncle Dickon."

"Absolutely?"

"Absolutely!"

"Good!" he said. "I knew that I could depend upon you, at least. Now, Basil, you have known me for some time, and I want you to say 'yes' or 'no' to my question, no matter how hard it may be for you to do so. Do you think I am or have been a little touched in the head at times?"

"No!" I cried in astonishment. "Why should you ask such a thing?"

"Be truthful, no matter how unpleasant it may be to tell me, my boy. There is nothing like the truth after all. Have you ever thought for a moment, or longer, that I might be insane?"

"Insane! You, Uncle? Absolutely no!"

"You are certain?"

"Of course! What in the name of heaven put that into your mind?"

He shook his head doubtfully, and sat down—the very picture of woe—upon the edge of his high walnut bed.

"Really, Uncle Dickon, I can't put it strong enough," I told him, for fear he might still have some lingering doubts of himself. "Your mind is, and always was, perfectly normal. Never worry yourself about such things."

"I won't any more, Basil," he responded gloomily, giving me the momentary reflection that he might have preferred my reply in the affirmative; and then he came close to where I stood, with a quick step which reminded me so of a few weeks ago, and reaching up he whispered in my ear: "Watch! Always watch! There is something desperate about to happen here! Something awful!"

"Where?" I cried in astonishment.

"Here! Here in The Silver Ship! I don't know just when, and I don't know just what it will be—yet! But trust no one, Basil; and—*watch!*"

I could get nothing further from him, although I questioned him at some length, and I had left the room heartsick and trembling, for I now saw that which he had apparently dreaded and suspected for some time: the poor man was evidently suffering from some mental disturbance of one kind or another.

But now that the very thing which he had prophesied had come to pass, early on the morning after the attack upon me I turned to my poor old relative as a confidant; and trusting in the hope that his apprehension of a strange happening might prove, not an aberration, but a key to the mystery.

He was still abed when I knocked at the door

of his apartment, but not asleep, and he welcomed me cordially whilst I packed some pillows behind him to add to his comfort and tucked in the covers to exclude the cold. It was a very large feather-bed on which he reclined, and into which he sank to such a depth that he seemed quite small by comparison; and his face looked unusually expressionable under a large pink nightcap surmounted by a vacillant tassel.

"How are you this morning, Uncle Dickon?" I asked, when he had been made comfortable and I had perched myself upon the footboard of the bed.

"I am as well," he responded, after casting about in his mind for words to describe his exact state, "as a blighted and stricken mortal has any right to be."

"For goodness sake!" I laughed. "What blight has struck you? Listen to me a moment, and I will soon relieve you of any suspicion regarding your mental condition. Do you recall a little talk you and I had regarding a possibly imminent catastrophe?"

"Yes."

"It has come!"

I suppose I should have told him in a different manner, but I was so intent on what I hoped to glean from him that I never thought of causing a shock until I saw the result of my words. His

face paled, his eyes closed, and a slackening of the muscles of his body suggested that he was about to swoon. I made haste to assure him that I was the only victim of the attack, and gave him more or less of a vivid account of the affair, bringing the color again to his cheeks and the light to his eyes.

I did not mention that one of my assailants was the servant of the Great Lady. Likely he had forgotten her by now, and unless it came through *his* unraveling of the purpose of my being done to death I decided not to introduce her name. No other point on the tale, however, was left untold as far as I could remember. I went into each angle of the affair minutely, and ended by bringing forth the sword-blade for inspection.

He listened intently, and without interruption, until I had made an end, and then he asked me to repeat the entire occurrence carefully once more, in the possibility that I might have omitted something during the first recital. This I did—from the sound of someone scratching on the tap-room shutter until I staggered, bruised and bewildered, to my own room. After my story my uncle begged leave to remain silent in thought for a short time.

His process of mental concentration, while possibly efficacious, was certainly exceptionally distortive. All I could see of him as he lay sub-

merged in the great bed was that cross-section of his face between his fat double chin and his elevated eyebrows, but he so twisted and harassed these discernible features—squeezing his eyes tight shut and compressing his lips, while he wrinkled his nose out of all human shape, as though he was attempting to suppress a gigantic sneeze—that I eventually became alarmed lest these contortions might forecast a seizure of some sort, and broke in upon his reverie.

“Well,” I asked, “and what do you make of it all?”

At my interruption his features instantly recovered their accustomed status, and he replied, with great gusto, “Nothing!”

“Nothing!” I cried in amazement.

“Ab-so-lute-ly nothing!” he repeated.

“But you must know something about it! Why, Uncle, you predicted it!”

“I predicted it?” he shouted. “Not at all, Basil! Not at all!”

“You certainly told me a few days ago that you were expecting something very serious to take place.”

“True,” he rejoined. “But when I said *serious*, I meant something very, *very* serious.”

I felt I could have been pardoned for arguing that nothing could well assume, in my estimation, much greater gravity than my own assassina-

tion, but I was so amazed and disappointed by his ignorance of the reason for the attack upon me that I felt it useless to go further.

"You can suggest no possible explanation, Uncle?"

"None whatever."

"You feel this has absolutely no connection with the fears you seem to harbor?"

"I cannot see that they bear any possible relation whatever. This matter of yours, if you will pardon my frankness, rather suggests to me some youthful scrape in which an irate husband might be involved. Regarding this you, certainly, should be the best informed."

"There are no grounds for that assumption. Had I the faintest idea of the cause of that sword thrust I would not have bothered you."

"You have not bothered me, Basil. I am only too happy to have you stop and confide in me at any time."

"I thank you," I said, and was about to leave, when a thought made me hesitate. "Tell me, Uncle Dickon, are you still of the same mind as you were when you told me to watch and beware? Have your apprehensions decreased, or are you still fearful of some strange incident about to befall The Silver Ship?"

"I am still fearful."

"Although you cannot tell me just what form it will take?"

"I do not know."

"You know of no means to prevent it?"

"None."

"I must, then, be prepared for the worst?"

"The worst!" he cried, again suppressing a gigantic sneeze. "The worst will be little or nothing compared to what I fear will happen!"

I felt that no sincerity could have gone further.

"Again I must tell you that I regret bothering you with my story. If you do not mind, however, I would prefer you would say nothing to anybody about it for a while. We must keep our own counsel for a time."

"Brew me in my own ale if I ever mention it. We can always trust each other in that respect, Basil. Tell me, who stirs below stairs? Is your aunt risen so early?"

"Not yet, I trust. Joan is probably about. Her willing hands lighten Aunt Tulip's burdens considerably."

"Yet they are poor hands for such work," he responded thoughtfully. "She has a nimble wit, however, and might aid you in solving your problem if you care to trust her with it. Say nothing regarding *my* fears to her, or to any other."

I thought his advice good regarding my new cousin. Indeed, without even a suggestion from

him it is likely I would have gone to her, if but to experience the pleasure of watching her varied expressions during the recital. A very warm friendship had sprung up in the few weeks of her stay between Joan and me, which was not, upon my side, founded alone upon propinquity, although we shared in what diversity of work and pleasure there might arise about the inn. The Captain, had he not been so preoccupied with his own grim thoughts of late, might have imagined he had seen his prediction come true; and Uncle Dickon—the Dickon of yesteryear—would have nudged me, and chuckled and choked and leered; but he, too, had other thoughts to fill his mind. Therefore we were but goodly friends, and with nothing to cause abashment between us, with the exception of my knowledge of the somewhat anomalous situation she held at The Silver Ship.

I went seeking her therefore, and haply found her alone (except for old Philemon, the house cat), in her little hallway behind the stairs which she had turned to horticulture, and where she was now busily pruning some potted flowers and ferns, gathered within at the first threat of winter's blighting grasp. I thought that I had never seen her look so seemly as upon this particular morning, although it was strange that I even noticed this especially, being much engrossed over the hateful thought of the Great

Lady's possible perfidy. Her dress was plain, as always—such an one as some upper servant might effect,—while her Dutch cap and short apron of linen added to the daintiness of her appearance. To tally with an occasional imperious carriage of her trim head—which ill accorded with her present labor or station—she was protecting her hands with large garden gloves; snipping away with a small pair of rusty shears, and singing softly at her work.

Not being promptly observed, and nothing loath to rest my eyes upon so fair a garden—where the blue of the corn-flower deepened in the light of Joan's sapphire eyes, and the white rose drooped in distress when its tiny thorns clung naughtily to an arm whose skin was as smooth and pale as its own soft petals—I silently leaned against the wall in the shadow of the steps. As she worked she sang, I say; and the great yellow cat lay blinking and purring on the wide sill, content to hear her loved voice, and lend his not unattractive color value to the palette from which the morning sun drew forth his variegated inspiration.

“Mort, j'appelle de ta rigueur,
 Qui as ma maistresse ravie,
 Et n'es pas encore assouvie
 Se tu ne me tiens en langueur,”

she hummed, with many pauses incidental to the

making of odd little grimaces when the dull shears balked at a thick stem. What is the charm, where lies the witchery in this exquisite love-child, that I should, when her eyes meet mine, forget my sublime passion for the Great Lady, and find my heart too small to hold the surge of yearning that her loveliness inspired? Surely I must tear from out my mind devotion for her other than a courtesy my uncle's child demands. Surely it were best for all that I should leave unavowed even to myself that since she's here I've changed as much, and more, than Uncle Dickon himself. Yet if she stands thus in the morning's glow how can I close my eyes upon her luminous beauty; and if she lifts her voice, as now she does, why should the melody of love be lost to me?

“*Deux estions, et n'avions qu'ung cuer!*

S'il est mort, force est que devie,

Voire, ou que je vive sans vie —

Why, Basil! How long have you been standing there? And breakfastless too, I suppose!”

“The Captain makes much game of my French, but surely that is no cheerful song on a bright morning?”

She smiled, and putting by her shears began to draw off her gloves as she answered.

“I was thinking of something far, far away, and scarcely knew of what I sang.”

"Your reverie was not of the happiest, then?"

"Rather the contrary, really."

"But the song was something regarding a lover who sought to join his mistress in death, was it not?"

She laughed and nodded.

"Then it is very pertinent to a little matter I have come here to discuss with you if you can spare me some moments alone."

"Are you jesting?"

"Far from it, as my many bruises will testify," I answered, pointing to a contusion on my cheek-bone where a flying fist had found a target during the previous night's encounter. She gave a soft cry, a little murmur of compassion, and drawing me closer to the light made an examination, her cool finger-tips caressing the wound with deft tenderness.

"You have been hurt, Basil, and here was I standing singing! Why—look! Your throat is clawed and swollen, and I think you are with a fever! Let me——!"

"Now," said I, "don't imagine that there is anything in the world wrong with me but the desire for a little advice. Just you stand right here and let me tell you a story——"

"But you have been hurt, and I must do something for you!"

"Hurt! these scratches are nothing."

“But I must help you!”

“You certainly must,” said I; and I lifted her up in my arms and set her, feet dangling, on the broad window-sill directly beside the house cat, Philemon. Now Philemon is a creature of many experiences both of pleasure and pain; therefore, when his mistress was so suddenly placed up beside him, although he finally settled back again in the sun to drowse and purr, for a moment his yellow back curved and his eyes narrowed in surprise. And Joan made her features into one of those same little grimaces I had noticed before, and she looked at the cat, and kicked her wooden heels against the wall; but I think she was really much more surprised than was Philemon. As for me—who until then had never felt her warm young body in my arms or the touch of her hair against my cheek, who had never before thrilled to the touch of her finger-tips nor sensed the perfume of her presence, who had yet to gaze into the azure abyss of her eyes and, like a crystal-gazer, read therein the secret of my future happiness—I, I think, was the most surprised of all.

Therefore, just a little bit more flushed than the slight exertion of lifting her would usually justify, I said:

“Just listen to me, and my story, Joan, and give the advice you think best. It is simply a kind of foolish riddle I am putting to you, that

you may help me to guess the answer. I am not sick or injured, or in need of anything but fair counsel—and my breakfast when Peg calls me to it—and, will you promise to help me so much? ”

“ Yes,” she said, a little breathlessly. Perhaps we were both a trifle abashed.

“ Fine! Now your song was about a man who called on death to take him, that he might be with the girl he loved. My story is of a girl who wished a man who loved her to die. Why? Well, that is where your feminine viewpoint may assist. I will begin at the beginning—shall I? ”

“ Please.”

I stood close to her side, my elbows upon the high window-sill on which she rested. I tried to tell her my dilemma while looking up into her face, but her eyes disconcerted me. I think it was her eyes, or perhaps it was a froward tendril of hair which rippled from beneath her cap, or her slightly parted lips which shone like the budding jackrose whose crimson crest flamed among the dancing motes in a sunbeam. It was the same tale I told, but the sympathy and interest of my hearer made it new.

“ One night, when first I came to The Silver Ship, a lovely lady rode to the door of the inn, and I assisted her to alight. She was beautiful beyond belief, with curling black hair and gray eyes ——”

"Did she come alone?"

"No. She was accompanied by a great, sluggish one-eyed manservant, and a buxom maid named—named—Cora. As this lady looked upon me in the candle-light she started, as though I was no stranger to her, and shortly sent for me to the guest chamber. She there told me of a remarkable coincidence. It was that she was in love with, and betrothed to, my brother Roger."

"Did she tell you that?"

"Yes, surely. And she also said ——"

"Excuse me," Joan interrupted; "but I am anxious to make no mistake about this. Did this lady mention your brother's name?"

"I think so—yes. How otherwise could she have told me that she was to marry him?"

"I don't know. I only wished to be certain that it was, without any possible question, your brother Roger to whom she had given her heart. Well?"

"She told me nothing of herself, really, except that I must assist in their romance, and tell no one regarding it ——"

"And you *have* told no one, Basil?"

"No one but you now—and Captain Rumm."

"The Captain!" cried Joan in surprise. "You told the Captain!"

"Yes. I saw no harm in that. He knew neither of the parties involved, and could be in-

terested in no possible manner. As a matter of fact he gave me some very good advice regarding the Great Lady—and he knows my brother after all, it seems.”

“May I ask you the advice he gave concerning the lady?”

“Well, it was generally along the line that strange women, no matter how fascinating, who run about of nights into public taverns, are not the best to pine in love over.”

“And have you pined for this strange girl, Basil?”

“Yes,” I said, after a pause. “I will admit to you, although it is hard to do so, Joan, that I thought this lady the loveliest vision ever my eyes beheld—and she was! For then I had not seen you.”

“I think it best that no comparison be drawn between this person and me.”

“I draw no comparison, Joan; but indeed if you had seen her you would have acknowledged that she was one of high standard in everything, including birth.”

“Wherein I,” said Joan, turning to look away, “can in no way—alas!—compete.”

It was the first time she had ever made mention of the sad revelation her mother’s letter had made, and being stupid in such matters—and embarrassed—I knew not what to answer. She had

turned her face toward the casement through which the warm sun streamed, and the profile before me was bathed in an aureola of glowing gold. How firm and round was her dimpled chin; and her lips, how sweet their curve. Upon the sill beside me there lay a languid hand, the slender fingers idly twisting the stem of a plucked geranium whose pink petals, overblown, fluttered one by one upon her pinker palm. "Poor hands for work," Uncle Dickon had said, but he was wrong. The hand which I took so gently and fearfully in my own was able and resolute, but it was one which had known no toil or labor. It was a palm which had known no drudgery to which I pressed my lips; a palm cool and sweet with the perfume of the falling petals; and at its touch I fell a-trembling. It was as though this contact with her hand had torn aside a curtain revealing a vista of happiness heretofore undreamed of, and yet while I longed to tread this path of rose-strewn moonlit adventure the apprehension of my unworthiness frightened me. So, marveling, I laid her hand again where it had rested, and said:

"I would be less honest than I should be with you if I attempted to deny that this lady was other than wholly charming. She fascinated me. Even now I cannot think of her but kindly."

She had not stirred at my humble kiss, but she turned toward me at this.

"Why do you say 'even now'? Has anything befallen since?"

"Yes. You see, I was told by her that my brother Roger was to come here to the inn very shortly, and that I was to assist them in their romance. I waited and waited, but so far he has not come. I also thought it possible that some word of instruction might come for me—from her, but always I have been disappointed. Last night, at a late hour, there came a tapping on the shutter beside me as I sat drinking my ale. Wondering whom it might be, or what it would purport, I went to the door with the candle. There stood the ponderous one-eyed lackey of the Great Lady, as clearly seen in the candle-light as I see you now. Thinking no deceit, I allowed myself to be led a short way from the door, and was there set upon by this man, and a hired bravo, and had I not been most fortunate they would have left me there a corpse."

"Did they carry arms?"

"The servant did not, evidently, but the hireling made at me with a sword, which I was lucky enough to shatter with a blow of my candlestick. At that they shortly took to their horses, and were away."

"Toward the south?"

"Toward the south."

"You have received no wound, Basil?"

"Naught but a few bruises."

"Did they leave nothing behind? Nothing by which they could be traced, I mean?"

"This broken blade only."

She took the shining steel in her hands and scrutinized it carefully. "Do you own a sword, Basil?" she finally inquired.

"Do I?" I cried. "I own, and can well use, a beautiful blade, willed to me by my grandfather, Theophilus Tremaine. It is one of the handsomest swords which could be drawn upon this whole continent."

"This would also seem to be one above the ordinary. Have you looked at it well?"

"No," I said, and took it for examination. It was clearly a splendid Damascus rapier, pliant as a reed yet edged to a perfect temper. Covered to the point with delicate chasing, toward the end nearest the break I could distinguish a crest, and the letters A. B. worked into a design below. I drew Joan's attention to the monogram, and wondered if it was that of the owner, or of the smith who fashioned it.

"He was no common assassin," she said. "Such weapons are rare."

"Perhaps this blade belongs to the family of the lady, and was given to him to make away

with me. I only wish I had gotten from her her name."

"Why do you think always that it was this lady who sent the assassins? Might they not have come from another?"

"I cannot see how. He was her servant—of that I am certain. And I remember now that he told me he had been with her house a long time. Who else could wish for my death?"

"I'm sure I don't know; but why should she wish for it?"

"I don't know; and I thought you might see some purpose in the attack. That is why I have told you."

"Perhaps it was some form of jesting to frighten you."

"I tell you both men were in deadly earnest."

"Then you were mistaken for another."

"Impossible," I cried. "I was bearing the light, and was not the servant there to identify me?"

"You might have been mistaken for your brother Roger."

"I no more resemble Roger than I resemble Uncle Dickon."

"Why you must!" she answered in surprise. "Did not this woman recognize you at once from your likeness to your brother?"

"Well"—said I thoughtfully, for this was

something I had not considered before, "she *said* that that was the case, but I can scarcely understand it. I guess she knew when Uncle Dickon told her my name."

"She knew your name, then. I thought you said ——"

"You're right; she asked me my name. I remember that for certain."

"What do you think about her knowing you so promptly then?"

"I don't know. I am sure it all seemed very natural then. There must have been something else said, perhaps, which I did not notice."

"You were too much enthralled by the beauty of the lady to notice anything much, I am afraid, Basil. Let me think over the matter for a while. And in the meantime, if you will take my advice you will tell the entire experience to the Captain."

"Why tell him?" I asked, and she must have noted my hesitation.

"Principally," she replied, "because if there is any fighting to be done—and I truly pray there will not be—Captain Rumm is a good man to have at your side."

"I can take care of myself, Joan."

She placed an arresting hand upon my shoulder. "That was not meant for a reflection upon either your courage or your swordsmanship, Basil. Remember, however, that last night there were

two scoundrels against one unarmed man. Even if you arm yourself, to-morrow may bring a score or more against you. Take heed!"

I shook my head stubbornly, and smiled up at her. "So that is the best advice you have to give?"

"It is the best I have at the moment. Perhaps thinking upon the matter may develop something further."

"Perhaps. And until then I will say nothing to the Captain."

"If you hold my best counsel in such little respect," said Joan, "I will descend, and return to my pruning."

"Let me assist you down."

"Nay! I am able to jump as lightly and gracefully as Philemon himself, thank you."

"Doubtless," said I. "But having placed you there, I feel I must put you down again."

"Nonsense, Basil. Let me get myself down," she insisted; but my arms were already about her, and my heart was beating as though all the loveliness the great world held was close and secure in my grasp.

"You have been hurt! You will further fatigue yourself with my burden!" she argued, and at that I lifted her as though she were a feather, and held her tight in my arms.

"Tired with your sweet burden!" I laughed,

thrilling with the first step along that Elysian path my love for her had pointed me. "Why, I could bear you thus until the end of time, and ever grow stronger in the nearness of your adora ——"

"Basil! Are you not ashamed to hold me thus ——"

"Never will I put you down until you listen to me! Joan, my ——"

"Put me on my feet, and I will listen to you all the day. For shame! To use your man's strength against my frailty. And Philemon looking on, to later gossip in the tap!"

"No. I have you now. You'll pay the greater heed to what I say when thus you're held. I know you think I am a weak and foolish fellow for seeing such beauty in this chance encounter of a well-favored lady. True it is that she stirred my heart within me, but it wasn't her that I loved, but the woman I dreamed she was, the woman I prayed she was, the woman I had builded in my heart of every pure and lovely attribute of which I'd ever learned. It was when I first met you, Joan, that I realized this goddess of my desire was not founded upon a chimera, but was moulded and clothed with all the character and loveliness and tenderness of *you*; and I realized, perhaps, in some not too distant day, I might indeed wander in this coveted realm where you

would breathe the incense of my love, nor seek to quench the fire of my true devotion."

"But Basil——"

"Nay, do not think me shallow or impetuous! Do not think of me as lacking in respect, or wanting in depths of real emotion, Joan. Truly I love you! Love you! Love——"

("Master Basil!" cried Peggie, the barmaid, from the landing above.)

"You can have no idea, dearest dear, just how——"

("Master Basil!" insisted Peggie.)

"—and if you tell me 'No' one thousand times, I still will——"

("Master Basil, your breakfast is waiting!")

"Here he is, Peggie," called back the fair subject of my protestations. "Come here if you want him, Peggie!"

Well the minx knew that I would put her down upon her feet rather than start the tongues in the scullery wagging, but her grasping at this opportunity to escape plagued me much, and none could know that better than she. Now, Peg had just one short flight of steps to descend, but thank heaven she is a deliberate creature, and those laughing lips, colored and perfumed like the budding jackrose, wavered close before me. Now it is likely that I should not have—and yet there is an excuse in such an act, as any man in my posi-

tion might attest. It was well she did not scream—instead her face went white as a lily—so that when Peg arrived to tell me that I was to breakfast with my aunt, my own cheeks wore a higher color than did Joan's, as she bent over the corn-flowers by the window.

Old Philemon, whom I had quite forgotten, rose sinuously and stretched his yellow body. He said nothing, however, which was not remarkable, but when I leaned from the stair to take a last look back, although both Joan and Philemon were smiling after me, it was he who winked.

CHAPTER VII

TELLING OF HOW THE CAPTAIN DECIDED UPON A JOURNEY

It was thus that I fell in love, and on all the earth—north, south, or east, or west, no happier man than I could have been found. My love—how delectable she was!—proved wilful at times, whereat I loved her best; or played demure and shy, at which I loved her more; or when the evening shadows lengthened into dusk, and the pine logs spluttered and sparked in the fireplace, I would wait for her in the twilight of her floral bower, and—flushed cheeks hidden by her perfumed hair which matched in Stygian shade the gracious night—she might creep close within my longing arms, at which I loved her so I was afraid.

The company of the Captain I almost forsook. I would have told him of my new-found joy at the very first, but I confess I feared his booming laughter. He had warned me time and time again that Joan would win me ere the month had passed, and I could easily picture his boisterous satisfaction—never really crass nor indecorous, yet still a jarring note amid the harmony of my infatuation. Perhaps he was not so blind, how-

ever, as to overlook the probable evidence, but if so he gave no hint of it, which was his cultured way; and without a word of consideration on the subject Joan and I decided to retain our love in secretive enchantment.

Philemon knew, of course; and very shortly dear Aunt Tulip must have learned the truth. She guessed it very soon indeed, for not a week had gone before I realized that our devotion was known to her, and I went, because I felt I must confide in someone, and told her all my hopes and all my fears, and as much of my happiness as I could gather adjectives to express. She was kind and accordant, interested beyond belief, and as enthusiastic over my darling as almost I was myself. She assured me that the union of her two adopted children was her paramount wish; but when I suggested breaking the glad tidings to Uncle Dickon she was less eager than I could have wished, and bade me withhold this information from him until he was more himself than he had lately shown.

Not so deeply impressed with this well-meant advice as I should have been, I slipped into the landlord's bedroom early one morning, as I had done before, and was received with such an affectionate welcome that I thought the moment ripe for my recital.

"Uncle Dickon," I began, "on the last morn-

ing visit I made you my story was not altogether an agreeable one, if you remember."

"Did you ever learn more of the two bandits?" he asked.

"No. Nothing. But there has been another robbery about here lately, Uncle Dickon, and I know the thief."

"I'll fry in my own fat," cried he, "if it doesn't turn out to be that red-headed stable boy who came last month. I never saw such bowed legs in my life!"

"For once you're wrong," I laughed. "Those legs *have* a curve, but for all I know they are bearing him down the straight and narrow path. I am more afraid of the horses running away with him than of him running away with the horses. No, this naughty fellow's name is Dan!"

"Dan?" said my uncle. "Dan? We have no Dan here that I can remember."

"His first name is Dan, however; and his last name is Cupid! He has stolen my heart right out of my body, and given it away. Uncle Dickon, I have fallen in love!"

"Well! Well! Well!" cried he in huge delight. "So you have lost your heart at last, my boy! That is good news, I take it, for you'd not tell of it to me, I know, unless you'd got a kind reply from *her*."

"I have such promise as her high spirit and modesty will permit."

"Fine! Fine! Sit you on the bedside a moment, Basil, and I will tell you what plans I have made for the future—yours and mine. I am growing old in years,—old and weak. Nay! Raise not your hand in protest. So it is, and well is it known to both. This inn is mine, having come to me through my Uncle Richard, for whom I'm named; and like you, as a boy I came to him to 'prentice at the work. He had the dropsy in his dotage, poor old man, and in the summer used to sit upon the bench about the buttonwood, whilst I—so quick and smart, you'd scarcely think!—looked after all, and proved a good dependent. That's many a year ago. It's time I hied me to that selfsame bench and watched the world go by, like one apart. I'll not live long—tut-tut! Who could know better? The Silver Ship is yours when ere you wish to carry on the labor. I'll not ask that a room, a place at table, and a kindly thought will each and all be given to your aunt. You know your duty, and I know your gentleness."

"How can I answer to your love and faith in me?"

"By telling me all of your future hopes. By letting me aid you to your future happiness. First of all, who is the maid? None hereabout, I know.

It must be one whom you knew at home. Come! What's her name?"

"I love my love with a J," I said, smiling.

"Hah!" he cried. "You love your love with a J, because she is—she is—gentle!"

"I love her so because she is a jewel!"

"You love her so," he chuckled, quite delighted with his own wit and original spelling, "because she is generous!"

"I love her," said I, seriously, "because I cannot do otherwise."

"But not against your will?" he asked, apprehensively. "Not against your better judgment?"

"No, Uncle. Far from that. I love her because she is the sweetest, truest, dearest, loveliest maid this world has ever known. I am going to marry Joan, Uncle Dickon! Your Joan! Our Joan! *My Joan!*"

He did not reply to my enthusiastic *dénouement*. Instead he turned as pale as the sheets wrapped about him, and sank back in the bed as one might sink from sight into an ocean of despair. At first I thought this but a phase of the humor which formerly attested itself in leers and nudges, a form of that peculiar drollery he frequently affected, but when he again emerged it was as though the Old Man of the Sea was indeed astride of his shoulders. His face was as ashes,

and his voice rasping and uncertain with a kind of irate terror.

"This shall not be!" he articulated thickly. "This shall not be! How dare you to come to me with such a plot!"

"Plot?" I cried.

"Do not press me too far!" he threatened. "I can stand just so much! Who thought of this? Who sent you here to me with this——"

"Plot! Do you imply that there is aught but love in that of which I speak?"

He put out his hand and grasped my arm—I had not risen from the side of the bed whereon I sat—and looked long and searchingly upon my countenance. Poor ashen face; poor trembling hands; the fear he had expressed to me about his shaken mind was then too evidently true. Of all the ills that we poor mortals face, the worst, I think, is madness. Who feels no terror of the filthy straw, the chains, the whip, and, more than all, the gaping crowds. I laid my hand firmly upon his, and spoke to him as one might explain to a little child.

"Uncle Dickon, I am in love with, and wish to marry, Joan Tremaine, your natural child. I would like your consent to our betrothal. May we hope for your blessing?"

The touch of my hand seemed to lend him comfort. Still looking intently at me he ap-

peared to be turning the question over in his mind.

"Basil," he said finally, "don't it read in the Bible you must 'tell the truth and shame the devil'?"

"I am afraid not in just those words," I replied hesitatingly.

"Well, if it don't it should," he said. "And woe unto him who stops telling it and living it, and goes contrary. That's Bible, Basil. You know that 'woe unto him' is. If your aunt has read that out to me once, she's read it a mort of times."

"There's no doubt of that," I told him.

"Well—Basil," he seemed to have great difficulty in choosing his words, "I cannot tell you why, although my reason is the best, but if all thought of this marriage is not laid by forever, The Silver Ship is not for you. I say no word against the girl, understand; but there will be no marriage between you if I can prevent it."

"But surely, Uncle Dickon, you would not visit upon this child the punishment for a misdeed wholly yours?"

"I was not alone to blame," he answered doggedly.

"In a broad sense, perhaps no. But the woman is dead now; and surely the maid is guiltless of any wrong."

"I cannot make you understand," he argued wearily, and sank back into the bed as though to terminate the interview.

"You amaze me!" I cried, angrily. "I ever looked upon you as a man of sense and character. What right have you to condemn the child? Yours was the wrong. And now that you are given by heaven an opportunity to in part wipe out this heavy debt, you hesitate, and argue, and try to besmirch your own! Your good wife—a saint beside us both!—looks with favor on our early marriage. Don't think your now oversensitive conscience, dormant these many years, can martyr me for errors *you* committed. I'm at The Silver Ship at your good will. I know that fact full well. I'm down the river when you say the word. But when I go—if it be to-morrow or next year—if she's in life your daughter goes with me!"

"Basil!" he shouted, for I was at the door. "Come back! Hear me for a moment. I would rather lose my life than you, as well you know. Stay! But postpone this marriage for a while. I cannot live long now. Wait till I'm dead. Do not rush into this——"

"Rush! Devotion like mine brooks neither postponement nor delay. Mistake me not! As soon as Joan will wed me—with your consent or without it—that day she'll be mine. This is my

last word upon the subject. To-day, if she will! To-morrow, if she would wait! And though she says a thousand years from now, and I'm alive—and I'm alive ——! ”

A sudden horror gripped me by the throat and turned me back. I thought he cowered down among the covers. I bent above him in no gentle mood.

“Some nights ago I was attacked. By whom? For why? I could not guess the cause or reason then. But now ——! ”

It was the old Richard Tremaine who sprang from his bed at my words; and yet not the man whom I had previously known, but a fearless, unflinching and dominant personality. With his night-wrapper aflutter and his cap awry there was still a dignity manifested which bade me brace myself to receive a just rebuke.

“At last,” he said—speaking with intense heat, yet keeping his tone modulated to the room alone——“at last I am on safe ground again. Who says I stoop to bloody treachery lies! Lies! Lies! Swallow *that* word, and let it cool your blood—or spit it back at me, and choose from a brace of pistols by my pillow. You'll here and now admit to me that well you know no true Tremaine would play so foul a game—or one of us will die before you leave this room! ”

“Well ——” I began, and made to hesitate; but

"*Speak!*" he roared; and I saw I must do but the one thing.

"I did you a wrong, sir. For that I ask your pardon."

"Hah!"

"But for the word and treatment you accord your daughter——"

"Enough! Leave the room!"

"Not before I repeat——"

"Repeat nothing! Out of my apartment!"

"—repeat that nothing you may say will bear weight with either me or your daughter——"

"My daughter!" he sneered angrily.

"Is she not your daughter?" I cried, opening the door.

"She is a daughter of Belial!" he shouted, and kicked the door to behind me.

I was in a mind to return, but the bolt had shot on my exit, so I stood irresolute on the landing and pondered on the sanity of the man. Had he continued to sweat and cringe in his bed I would have sent for a leech to drain his madness from his veins; but his outburst at my accusation seemed normal enough, under the circumstances. I was in a quandary, and it was nothing I could well take to either my aunt or Joan. I thought of the Captain, but to him there would be a deal of explanation. He thought, as did everyone apparently, that Joan was the landlord's niece. The

nightly coterie—or some few members of it—had cast a doubt upon her relationship at her arrival, but this had since died away; although there had never been, or so it seemed to me, quite the same amity as when Uncle Dickon had been the centre of the group. Since her arrival, his silence of the past, and his gradual but decided waning in health had produced a dispiriting effect on all. The Captain had, in a way, taken his place as a *raconteur*; but his plots, while filled with action and interest, lacked the fleshy charms of the landlord's former successes. The Silver Ship was gradually but surely veering in her course. It seemed there was no master at the helm.

While I stood meditating the Captain emerged from his room. Not usually an early riser I was surprised to see him astir, and sought to discover if he was wearing another of his black moods. It would seem not so, however, for he smiled and waited for me along the hall; yet when I had further talked with him there seemed a gentleness—"a sweet melancholy"—upon him, which same I had not, until now, associated with his character. He detained me with a compelling arm across my shoulders.

"Whither away this bright morning, Sir Lancelot? Is there some fair Guinevere waiting you this dawn?"

"What lady could await me?" I asked shortly.

Had the Captain noted my devotion? Evidently not, for he changed his form of banter.

"You are then, it may be, that goodly knight, Sir Galahad, great Lancelot's son, called by the yearning of a golden Grail?"

"I am called for a yearning for my breakfast, if you must know."

"Alas! Alas!" he said, still holding me to a standstill on the steps. "That you should match sublime emotion against muffins and ale."

"I have travelled some distance through life minus your sublime emotions," I retorted; "but muffins and ale, or their equivalent, have proved themselves essential to my existence."

"*Diantre!*" he said. "Your practical outlook would be a wonderful thing for me when I have that which I must do to-day. I will adopt it now, as much as possible, that I make known to you my latest fond emotion. Look upon me kindly, and give me a goodly grip of your hand, my Basil, for I am away."

"Away ——?"

"Ere night I depart from The Silver Ship—forever!"

"Depart ——?"

"Depart!"

"But—why?"

"I think it is my destiny."

"And where are you destined to go?"

“Well, possibly to—Naples,” he responded, a trifle hesitantly.

I do not know why, but it had never occurred to me, even in my wildest and most mournful imaginings regarding him, that Captain Rumm would really ever leave the inn. I suppose it was because I had scarcely known the time when he was not there. To Uncle Dickon, let us say, he was but a guest—a much loved one to be sure, but still just a traveller who had tarried longer than the rest. To me this was not the case. In the comparatively few weeks of his stay he had grown so steeped in the spirit and atmosphere of The Silver Ship, so bound about and associated with each function and tradition, so woven into the warp and weft of all which made this place my very land of heart’s desire, that I could no more think of The Silver Ship without his alluring personality than I could picture the smithy’s forge without his anvil, or the bootmaker’s shop without his last. Next to my darling Joan, he was closer and dearer to me than any other.

“So you are going away, to Naples?” I repeated mechanically, with a vague, disconcerting recognition that emotion *had* for once achieved with me a signal victory over muffins and ale. “But why do you go so suddenly, and—well, why do you go at all?”

“I leave here for the selfsame reason which

impelled me to come: a sublime emotion; one which has gradually gone flat and stale through want of quickening."

"You have not, then, heard from—her?"

"No. My fair Guinevere has fluttered no silken kerchief from the battlement of her granite fastness, that her true knight might hasten to the tryst."

"I wonder," said I, after a moment's thought, "if I dare ask you, 'have you heard of her'?"

He shook his head moodily, paused, and finally decided to give me a portion of his confidence.

"I had arranged to remain here until a token from her was forthcoming. A certain sign or gift was agreed upon—one which could not be duplicated easily—and which could carry but one meaning: the consummation of my life's greatest hope. I have looked for it from the very first day of my arrival. I have looked and longed and prayed for it each day I am here. It has not come. I am in personal danger. The net tightens about me. To remain longer is both useless and parlous. To-morrow, who knows——"

"To-morrow," I said, "the token may arrive."

He looked upon me with a smile which held more sorrow than any tears might show, and as his grip upon my shoulder loosed, my arms went 'round him in a close embrace.

"Do not go, dear friend! Stay for me—for

us all—for the sake of the love we all bear you! ”

“Dear lad,” he said tenderly, “it cannot be. You do not know all. I have many causes for this separation. One reason alone is sufficient, however. I came, and looked with delight upon this place as one to be hallowed by the fulfillment of my deepest and purest desire. Kind as you all have been, loving you all as I sincerely do, interested and entertained and restrained by all these affiliations, my love for *her* would be the less sincere, the less steadfast, did I not make it clear to you now, that with her promise kept I could not leave; and lacking her—each moment here is misery.”

“I understand,” I said. “It seems that there is nothing more for me to say.”

“Quite right. I do not want to even hear ‘good-bye.’ To-night, my score being paid and everything arranged, I slip away with Peddling Peter down the river.”

“You wish no one to know?”

“Crowning my major disappointment, I do not wish the dolor of farewell.”

We did not look at one another, but stood, eyes lowered, gazing into space. For me, I saw an empty chamber in The Silver Ship whom none could fill—an empty chamber in my heart that would be set aside, like consecrated ground, in

which to lay the spirits of fond memories to rest. I saw an unfilled chair beside the hob, a vacant hook behind the door where now he hung his hat and cloak; and more than all I knew that when I strolled the woodlands and the mead the echo of his voice would waft to me, heard through the medium of tender retrospection, which same would tell of days when greener grew the sward, more gold the sunset's glow, and when the river's purl equalled the harmony which bound us twain together.

Standing thus, I heard the quiet closing of his door. And heaving a sigh from the very depths of my heart, I slowly descended the stairs. My breakfast went practically untasted. My dinner also. Joan read in my face that something was wrong, but the Captain had asked that none should know of his departure, and I felt I could but keep it to myself. Uncle Dickon sat about the tap during the afternoon as usual, and while we had no words together I think he noted also that I was upset by something, and thought that his remarks of the morning were the underlying cause. As a matter of fact, since learning of the Captain's decision all else had slipped from my mind. I tried to walk in the woods, and the crisp frosted countryside spoke of him to me. When I rested within, each shining copper kettle and pewter plate reflected his happy smile. Since

breakfast no one, it would appear, had seen him. I fooled about in the tap, wondering if he was keeping to his room, or was already upon his way to the coast. Once I allowed a natural inclination to lead me to his door, but when I raised my hand to knock there came a strange fear upon me, the same fear that one might have when rapping at the door of the dead, that terror which, even though the one we call upon is gone, yet still they may step forth in awesome guise, and bid you cease this ill-timed summoning.

As the candles were lighted, in wretchedness I repaired to Joan in her bower. I think she thought this was some moodiness upon me, and with her very sweetness tried to lift the shadow from my brow. I held her close to me in the gathering shade, but my pain at the parting could not be forgotten even in my love of her. Soon she knew that there was a cause for gloom, but coax as she would I felt it might be best to keep his secret. Perhaps an hour passed, when upon the stairs overhead I heard the well-recognized step as Rumm descended to the ordinary. I noted, too, the light tapping of his scabbard, and the silvery tinkle of his spurs; and I knew then that the moment of his departure was at hand. His voice came clear to us down the curve of the steps.

"I'm in the mind of a gallop to-night, Peggie,"

he said. "Have you heard aught of my horse being brought, as I requested?"

"It goes dark for a ride, Captain," she replied, "but Blackbird is at the block since a quarter hour ago."

"Ah, it is as ever. All things are well done at The Silver Ship. Until we meet again, Mistress Peg, I bid you—farewell."

I think it was the trembling of my hands, in which her hands were nestled, which told Joan of the story I would fain conceal. What intuition in her spilled my secret out I am not certain, but as she whispered, lips against my cheek:

"The Captain leaves us! Does he leave for long?"

I answered with the truth: "He leaves forever!"

He was crossing to the low green door now, crossing so close to the steps above us that but for the turn in the stairs I could have seen him as clearly as I pictured him in my mind's eye. Yet before he could pass beyond our ken, and ere I could by deed or word interfere, Joan cried out to him in a light, jovial voice:

"Captain Rumm!"

And when he hesitated, yet did not reply, she called him still louder:

"Captain Rumm! Oh, Captain! Come for a moment to the lower hall!"

"Surely it is Mistress Joan who calls," he said, leaning over the stair rail and peering into the shadows beneath.

"It is. Come down but for a moment, Captain, and bring you a candle too. You are the best judge of a question I would put."

He lifted a taper from the mantel and bore it with him to the stair foot. Confused by the light and the occasion, he did not note my presence until he had placed the candle on the newel and was facing us two. As I expected, he was dressed for his journey, but Joan made no comment upon that. Instead she smiled most engagingly upon him first, and then upon me.

"Captain," she said, "there is a secret here, and so that I may question you, I am asking you to share it. You must know that this great Basil here has asked me—more than once indeed—to marry him. I have so few to go to for advice I thought that you, perhaps, might aid me in my decision."

It may have been embarrassment, or surprise that I had so early (as he had prophesied!) yielded to her loveliness, but he was confused for a moment, and covered the fact with a slight obeisance.

"I think," he ventured finally, "that your own heart would point the best counsel in so delicate yet momentous a matter. And, if I judge not

wrongly, it merely points you to a path my love for both of you would naturally indicate."

"I fear that is but a pleasant and tactful speech," she said. "Do you know the real character of the man you would bid me wed?"

"If I know not him I know of no man in this world. I may be cautious trusting some I call my friends, but here we have one whom all can honor. You would not ask me so if you had not decided long ago. Basil, I give you joy! Few men are so near deserving of such fortune. When angels stoop to mate with earthly mortals they well select those worthy of the eminence. Dear lady, if I may ——"

"Wait!" said Joan. "Perhaps your praise is well deserved; but let me tell you all. Just now, when I was near to—note not my blushes, Captain, for this must be told—near to sealing this same bargain with a kiss, my hand, in drawing round about my true love's neck encountered suspended by a cord the delicate love-token—of another! I said nothing to him of my discovery, fearing that the truth, if now his love for me is really sincere, might not be told. See, Captain! Thus it was!"

Standing beside me she, without warning, turned quickly her smiling face up to mine, and throwing an arm about my neck she reached the thread upon which hung the love-token of the

Great Lady for my brother Roger. Snapping the cord, she held forward to the Captain the small gold circle bound by the sable curl.

The next few minutes spell to me confusion. Joan had dropped the amulet in his palm, and with a quick turn was at my side again. Captain Rumm had given it but one fleeting glance, so it seemed, when, with a smothered cry of rage and disappointment, he rushed at me, aiming a blow with his open hand upon my face as one would strike a servant—or a deadly enemy. In my surprise I staggered back, and Joan, who had stepped suddenly between us as though to protect me from his assault, received the buffet upon her cheek. Binding my arms to my side with uncommon strength she held me for a moment still; the Captain and I glaring over her dark head at each other, I in fury, and he in consternation at the miscarriage of his blow.

As usual in such cases, the woman held the situation best in hand. Whilst I snarled, and Rumm sputtered, she had an hundred things to say, in which we were both blamed, and pardoned, flattered, and condemned—so that ere the mark of his hand across her face had turned from dull white to a vivid red she was up on the window-sill, with Philemon as a counselor in orange stripes beside her, to judge the right between us, as we stood one on each side, as free from

accord as two strange hounds at the butcher's door.

"The slap! La! 'Tis nothing. If that were all there was in the matter I'd blow out the candle, and to bed. But this bad blood betwixt you two must be cleaned away before I leave this perch if the dawn catches me here. First, Captain, look closely at the ring. Be certain it is the one which you expect."

"The ring was left for me," he answered shortly. "Any fool might know that—but one!"

"But Basil told you of the coming of the lady? It seems strange to me you did not recognize the description he gave of her."

"Description! He gave none that was understandable."

"No!" I cried hotly. "Because I was cut short by your bumptious laughter and priggish advice!"

"But surely he told you she was beautiful? And you were expecting a beautiful woman to see you!"

"True, he told me she was fair. But it was far from my thoughts that she herself would come. I had expected a messenger, a welcome carrier, even an envoy, but not herself."

"There you were at fault," said Joan. "She may have had none about her to trust. When she saw Basil at the door it was but natural she

should mistake him for your brother. Tell me, Captain, had this lady ever seen you with your face clean shaven?"

"She had seen me in no other guise. It was but recently that I allowed my beard to grow."

"You cannot blame her for misjudging the relationship, then; particularly when she knew you were coming secretly to this very place, and might need a friend by your side."

"I blame her not at all. But why do you speak of my coming here—secretly?"

"Why, you are here secretly, are you not?"

"I am here! Because I do not shout my business from the housetops must I be a slinker in the shadows, a renegade, a fugitive?"

"Why do you not go outright to the lady then? If you and your intentions are both honest why linger here and wait a secret message?"

He scowled a moment, and then he smiled upon her his most ingenuous smile. One proof of a great soldier is to know when to capitulate.

"*Morbleu!*" he said. "Your eyes are keen as well as bright. God keep me from a woman's intuition. You're right, I cannot go to her, for—as Basil will bear me out in what I have already told him—the lady's family like me not at all. Our meeting must be secret, thus you see."

"Her family, eh? And have they cause for their dislike of you?"

"It may be so," he replied, smiling again. "We, doubtless, all have secrets we would hide."

"There is still one thing I cannot understand," said Joan. "Basil, when the lady told you that this ring was for your brother, why did you jump to the conclusion it was for your brother Roger? You have still another brother, you know."

"Because she told me it was for Roger."

"But that seems impossible! The Captain's name is not Roger, is it, Captain?"

"It is John," he said. It struck me suddenly odd that this was the first time I had ever known just what his initial appellation was. John is a good solid name, but I had somehow expected something more descriptive—more picturesque.

"Basil," said Joan, with her hand upon my shoulder, "think very carefully of this matter. She could not have said Roger if she meant John. Picture the meeting in your mind, and tell us just what she said."

With my eyes upon her face I thought as intently as I might. "The lady said, 'You have a brother who follows the sea,' and I answered that I had. Then she asked me, 'What is his name?' I said that we called him Roger. She laughed—Yes, I remember that she laughed! As though it was a humorous thing that his name should be Roger. And she bade me give him the ring when he came. I have kept it safely since. I remem-

ber, too, that there was a motto cut on the face of the ring, but now I do not recall just what it was."

"Are you certain of all this?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, I cannot see where you are to blame, Basil. Though why the lady should have confused the two names——"

The Captain laid his hand gently on her arm in interruption.

"I see," he said. "I understand it all. It was a strange mistake for which no one is to blame. It is clear to me although I cannot explain it now. Basil, my more than brother, forgive the passion of a sorely tried man. You know, and now I tell you, Mistress Joan, that I was, when you called me just now, leaving for all time this goodly inn. Forgive the blow I dealt. You took it on your cheek to save him. It was right bravely done. Think not upon this parting, Basil, if you think of me again. Remember me as we roamed the fields and lanes with naught but amity between us. And now, having had this little explanation, I will upon my journey."

"Why fly from happiness?" asked Joan. "Here is the token for which you have waited."

"Think of the weeks which have passed. I hold no blame to you, Basil, but I have tarried overlong."

"Your love has withstood the test of waiting," said Joan. "Do you think so meanly of hers?"

"She has waited for an answer from me all these days. She must have long since thought that I had never come to claim her. I was not meant for happiness such as I dreamt of with her. Again—I am not worthy. This ring—this tress—I'll carry as a symbol of her momentary interest. I could not face a second disappointment."

"Before I let you go I must see the ring," said Joan. The Captain reached it up to her as she sat on the high window-ledge. "*Auctor pretiosa facit*," she read upon the bauble. "That is an appropriate inscription, indeed. You should take faith by that alone."

"I do not know the meaning of the words," he admitted.

"I do!" said I, much pleased that I might for once win over the Captain. "It means that the beauty of the gift is made more lovely because of the beauty of the giver, doesn't it?"

"Why, I thought the Captain spoke all languages! Surely all Latin tongues are familiar to you?" and the girl turned to Rumm in evident surprise. To my amazement he hung his head, and seemed intent on fitting the point of a spur into a crack in the flag floor. In a minute he

raised his head, and spoke with his eyes steadily upon her face.

"I have been a soldier for our King," he said, "on land and on sea. I was once captured by the French and laid to rot in a prison in their country. While there I picked up certain words and phrases. I have perhaps made the most of them in conversation. It may have been a foolish thing to do, but surely it was never harmful. I was assisted in escaping from this duress by a fellow prisoner, an Italian from Naples, where, after many adventures, we arrived. While there I further augmented my vocabulary with oaths and idioms from their speech. I came of gentle birth, but what knowledge I may honestly boast of was mostly gleaned by rubbing with the world at large. If I have seemed to preen in pennate flights of knowledge not my own, I beg your clemency for a mild conceit."

We were all three silent for a moment. Then Joan said: "While you were making this most frank confession, I have been looking at the ring. I have found a secret about it, too."

I was surprised at this, for she seemed to have been gazing into the Captain's handsome face as he talked, just as had I. But Joan is very quick, and sure enough she had uncovered a curious fact.

"The facet of this ring is hinged. Insert your

nail, or the point of a knife, at the edge, and it will disclose an opening, I believe."

The Captain took the gold circle delicately in his hand, and following her directions lifted the flat surface as though it were a tiny lid, and discerned a minute hiding-place below. Under the candle-light he drew forth a piece of paper so small as to contain but a short two words, and these written in the finest hand. He read them aloud as we leaned toward him in solicitude.

"Thine—forever!" he read.

"Splendid!" cried Joan, bounding from her perch. "Forever! And you fret about a month or more. For shame! Lay by your cloak and sword, and stay to seek her out. But wait! Best keep your good sword near to hand, for Basil has already been attacked by her people in the belief that he was you. Go with all speed to let the lady know that you are here, but be cautious. All that we two can do to aid you will be done."

As she spoke a change came over the man. His back straightened and his shoulders squared.

"I have always been certain of you both—and now I am certain of myself again!"

"One thing more," said Joan. "We should, under these circumstances, have no secrets from each other. Is there not something else that you can confide in us? Remember, we three can work together for a common cause better than you

alone. If you trust us as you say, had you not best trust us in all? ”

He was standing before us now, the same Captain Rumm who had thrust open our door on the first night of his arrival, with eyes sparkling, jaunty of carriage, and free of sword and tongue. Again there was evident that slightly self-sufficient air, that smiling affability which, in awaiting this stupidly withheld token, had lost gradually its first high polish. There was a twisting upward of the lips which smacked of contemplated conquests with both heart and blade; upon his cheek there surged the dye of a blood, long held in chilling apathy, now warmed to the lust of battle and desire. He did not walk, he strode, with head thrown back, his attitude a challenge to the world, while nervous fingers better draped his cloak, twirled his mustachios, or loosed his lengthy rapier in its sheath. We stood before him like two children gazing at some world's hero—some superman—convinced, it seemed, by nothing but his own colossal egotism; and yet his great charm lay in the truth that while we might puncture his pose, behind that lay a merit unassailable, nor would we have changed him one iota were it in our power.

“ Dear boy,” he said, with a bow to each as he spoke, “ and lovely lady, I am again in heart, and know myself unvanquished. This day I looked

upon the sunrise steeped in gold, upon the silver frost that lay upon the grass. I heard the music of the running river, the voice of children, and the wind's refrain. I saw fair nature in its noonday glory; and as I watched, the sweet, mysterious night clasped all in its embrace. 'Tis all God's handiwork; and yet I sighed and pined, with this great wonder spread before me, and read His message wrongfully. My God is kind! I do not fear the present, past, or future! Sweet maid, I'm for the tryst to-night. My horse is at the door. Basil, return these knapsacks to my room. No kinsmen's swords will bar my way henceforth. My cloak and sword I'll keep against the cold of winter, and of villainy. You two I trust. As to another secret which I carry, whether it shows me to a disadvantage at least it is not hidden from her I love. If she should think it wise you shall know everything. But what of you? Has not Basil kept his love from me, the knowledge of which would have given me scarce less pleasure than it has given him?"

"It is the only secret I have ever kept from you, Captain. You have my every confidence else, except that this very morning Uncle Dickon—whom I think mentally unsound—refused me his blessing on this same marriage."

"Impossible!" cried Rumm. "There is but one other as lovely in the whole land. What

reason could he have—a nephew and a niece, both dear to him?”

“Captain Rumm,” said Joan, firmly, “I am truly not the landlord’s niece. As Basil knows, I am his bastard child. Do not start back. You must know the truth eventually, so learn it from my lips. Before Richard Tremaine wed it would seem that he led a loose and profligate life. You may have heard from him some of the stories of his past. He met, and was loved by a girl named ‘Jean.’ Of me, the issue of this sorrowful romance, he knew nothing until after the death of this same light of love. The home I knew, while not bare of affection, had grown of late devoid of all which makes for happiness. I was alone. I came and laid my story at his feet. You are a soldier, but there are others who have known weariness and travail, suffering and hardships, just as you have known them. There are those who have longed to go forth just as you longed for the freedom away from your prison in France. As you were taken here—without question, suspicion, prejudice or hesitation—so was I welcomed. Here I have found a home; here I have found my love; here I have found my life. They have given me happiness, and I am so full of thankfulness that I cannot blame Richard Tremaine for withholding his consent under these circumstances.”

"With or without his consent, now and forever, you, my dearest Joan," I said, "are my only love. That, Captain Rumm, is the length and breadth of our romance, and its privacy will be respected by you, I know."

The Captain's jaw had all but dropped upon his chest in his amazement at this recital. His surprise had been followed by a certain embarrassment, superseded by an expression of absolute incredulity. When I had finished he turned to Joan with a leveled finger.

"Do you expect me to still speak with regard and respect of this man you claim to me is your father?"

"He has suffered through the knowledge of the suffering caused by his youthful indiscretions. I would not have you visit contumely upon him now."

"And what says his high-born and gentle wife?"

"She knows all—and has forgiven all. Remember, this happened long before their marriage. You must believe, if not from what I say from your own observation, that he has been a model husband and a true companion to Aunt Tulip."

"Do you," said the Captain to me, "look upon this affair in the same light as does this child?"

"Yes," I replied. "Uncle Dickon has made his

mistakes, but he has been a good husband to my aunt, and a good friend to me. In the matter of withholding his consent to our marriage, time will bring him to look upon it as do we."

The Captain paused in thought for a moment, and then turned to my love with an odd request. "You are apt to wear a linen coif upon your hair. Would you remove it, that I might see you the better with it off?"

Without a word Joan lifted the white cap from her head, and raised the candle so that light reflected in her blue eyes and shone in the lustrous waves of her heavy hair. The Captain slowly walked about her with intense scrutiny. Then he nodded thoughtfully, and she put the candle down. He gave another pause, and finally found his hat, and prepared to depart.

"Thank you for the—for the inspection," he said. "As for your story, I will hold it safe. Further confidences to you both I may make—following further thought. If, however, you are both eager for the truth, here is a morsel to chew upon. If either, or both of you, for that matter, are deliberately lying to me, do not flatter yourself that I am as gullible as some you may have fooled. Richard Tremaine and his wife have been married these forty years or more, and Mistress Joan is scarcely over twenty! Your words suggest poverty in your home! Look at those

tapering fingers white and unscarred by toil of any sort. Look at that tender skin, cared for and protected since the day you first saw light. Do you think that I would confess my lack of knowledge of French had I not heard you sing songs in that language with an accent and understanding I recognized as far superior to my own? Again—is there anything about you in features, actions, voice or manner, in lack of grace, or poise or education, which stands as an inheritance from this gross Tremaine? You may tell me this—you may tell me that! But you are never the child of Richard Tremaine—never! I say nothing of him which is meant in any but a kindly manner, but a rose such as you, my dear, never sprang from a cabbage such as he! ”

“But it is true!” I cried. “Joan admits it—and so does Uncle Dickon. Why, look at the tales he used to tell in the bar each night.”

“I am going,” said the Captain, “to win to my love this night. It is growing late, for we have talked long. At another time, if you are in the mind, we will straighten out this tangle. Before the dawn colors the sky above the pines I will have been nearer Heaven than this day I had ever thought to win. If I do not see her—and I will try!—I will at least be near where she is sleeping. Think nothing that I cannot credit the truth of your confession. Perhaps I will under-

stand it all when I am better informed. And as for the stories the landlord used to tell of an evening to his gathering of friends, remember I was for weeks in a prison with an Italian gentleman who spent much of the time with telling stories. Each tale the landlord told I knew by heart these many years. They were all written long since by a certain Signor Giovanni Boccaccio, a Florentine, and gathered into a book known as the Decameron. Now bless me upon my journey, and—good-night! ”

CHAPTER VIII

TELLING OF THE ENDING OF THE CAPTAIN'S JOURNEY

I COULD never put into words the sensations which I experienced when the Captain, with his parting shot making havoc of my verbal defense, sprang up the stairs, and away. It was not so much that he had thrown a doubt about the tale which Joan had led us to regard as true, but that he had voiced a suspicion which only my great love for her had held in leash. He had but pointed a few physical manifestations of her evidently gentle upbringing, while my thoughts instantly flew to an hundred confirmations of doubt as to her story. It was true that dear Aunt Tulip had received her and her past without question, and that Uncle Dickon had seemingly acquiesced in the sordid rôle to which he had been cast; but notwithstanding all my love and confidence I was not so blind as to ignore the evidence of my senses.

Being in doubt, therefore, as to the best thing to say under the circumstances, I said nothing, and it was Joan who broke the silence.

"Basil," she asked, "after what the Captain said, do you still believe in me?"

"I believe in you as I believe in nothing else," I said. "But I cannot feel other than that some of his arguments were well founded."

"You must give me all your faith," she said. "You must begrudge me nothing of your confidence. Some day I will tell you of my old life before I came to The Silver Ship. As you say, there is much in what he said, and I would not wed you without this explanation was first forthcoming. Remember, if you love me as you say you do, and as I believe, naught that I will say could make you love me less, weaken your trust, or lessen your respect. It is a long story, and at one time it were better that I told it to no one; but I feel that the time for secrecy has gone—although you will understand when you hear it that it is for your ears only for the present. To-night I cannot tell you, for it principally concerns another, and I must first receive consent. A few days will give me that, I hope; and then we will sit here with Philemon together, and I will babble on until you tire of my voice."

"You have more than satisfied me with the promise of an explanation. To-night the inn is busy, and Uncle Dickon's health and spirits, coupled with the absence of Captain Rumm, makes my presence in the tap desirable. Later I will make this promised story an excuse for spending all my leisure hours with you. There! More

hoofs at the door. We will be covering the stable straw with lodgers before the night is through. In case you remain from bed until late, wait for me here when you note the stirring cease above, if it is but to say 'good-night.' "

It was not late, but I discovered that already the house was short of beds, and a few of the less fortunate or less well pursed travellers were preparing to sit out the night about the fire, snatching what sleep they might on the flag floor or oak chairs in the general room. Uncle Dickon was seated in his accustomed spot behind the bar, (accelerated by the rush of custom into something resembling his former demeanor,) with Peggie pouring the seasonable ale, and the servants generally at their posts. Aunt Tulip was not by, but Master Sills, the chemist and tobacconist, was holding a warm debate with old Gregory Martin over some archaic administrative procedure, incomprehensible to me, and to themselves I firmly believe, although Squire Dykes of the Hillside Farms, and Master Sneed, the barber, nodded their heads sagaciously at each argumentative thwack of Master Sills' palm upon the broad arm of his favorite chair.

I glanced about to note who partook of our hospitality. Here and there a single transient, or small group, hung over a belated supper; but for the most, even at this hour, the weary wayfarer

was making what preparation possible to rest before the morrow's resumption. One figure drew my attention above the others, perhaps because the table before which he sat—one set far apart in a dull corner—held nothing of cheer in food or liquor, and sustained naught in fact but his two elbows, his hands cupped beneath his chin. He was a hard knit man of perhaps forty, with narrow eyes and an impenetrable face, and although at a few steps distant his attitude gave the impression of languor, his reply to my suggestion of service was as short as it was negative.

On threading my way back from him to speak to the landlord, a tug on my coat in passing one of the tables bade me turn, and I stopped for a few words with three seafarers whom I recalled readily as having told me of the capture of the pirate, Lambertine. They were deep-chested, hoarse-voiced fellows, with rings in their ears, and long knives at their hips, but an evident desire toward friendliness; and the allayment of that mistrust which Jack ashore at times engenders, made me linger longer than I otherwise would, to add a warmth of welcome.

"Do you remember the handbill which was stuck on the dresser when you were last here?" I asked.

"The one tellin' o' the pirate?" asked one.

"Yes," said I. "Well, you remember you told

me that this Lambertine had been caught? Now who do you suppose we have had staying at The Silver Ship for some time?"

They all shook their heads solemnly, without venturing a guess, yet it was noticeable that they awaited my answer with considerable interest.

"Why," said I, smiling into the upturned faces, "the very man who captured him, and got the reward!"

Two of the seamen burst, at my words, into raucous laughter, leering at each other with evident delight; but the third—a thick squat fellow with swarthy skin and beetle brows—hung his jaw in evident astonishment, and awkwardly crossed himself.

"*Bada, Tonio!*" cried one of the amused men, fetching across the shoulders of his awed companion a blow of good-fellowship which would have driven the breath completely from the average man. "*Taci sciocco! Calmatevi!*"

The other, less jarred by the blow than by the evident admonition, twisted his harsh features into the semblance of a smile, and answered in a soft Southern voice, the sweetness of which was in striking contrast to his rugged appearance. I did not understand his words, but after a short whispering conversation with the others he seemed again in good spirits, and ordered further liquor from Peggie in evident satisfaction.

I would have stood longer with the sailors, but a familiar voice hailed me from the tap, and I hurried away to discover if Peddling Peter had brought a letter to me from home.

"No packet to-night, Master Basil," he told me. "I came up sudden-like, to take down a passenger; but it seems that he is to travel in another direction."

"You mean Captain Rumm," I said. "Yes. He has changed his plans, and I trust they are changed for all time to come regarding his leaving The Silver Ship."

Peter nodded, and sipped his short ale. "He's a great man, the Captain," he said. "Not that I know aught of him but what is said hereabouts; but he seems well liked, as he should be. There's a lady in the matter, if I understand right?"

"How gossip spreads I never understand—but there is no harm for me to tell, I suppose, that there is a lady in the matter, and that he has gone to her now."

"Here at the inn?" asked Peter.

"No. Away."

"Far?"

"I know nothing except that he went upon his horse this half hour past. I scarcely look for his return, however, for some time yet. Perhaps not to-night at all. For my impression is that his

tryst is one of indefinite hour, and the place of meeting some leagues away."

"Hah!" said Peddling Peter. "That's good news."

"It means the fulfillment of the Captain's dearest hopes—if all goes well."

"It means a lot," said he, shaking his head and stirring his ale thoughtfully; "it means a lot, I'll say."

I asked him not to leave until I had given him a message for my father, and sat down at an empty table to pen a line or two of dutiful explanation of a rather protracted silence. Although no letter had been brought, the peddler had seen my father within a day or two, and knew that all was well with him. I gathered my pens and paper about me, and began with a flourish; but when I came to the meat of the epistle, which was Joan and my future hopes, I balked like a mule, and could not get on no matter from what angle I approached the subject. If Uncle Dickon would have approved the mating it might have been different. I could have then said that all agreed upon the desirability of our early union. I chewed the feathers of my pen, and tried to see a way about this obstacle. Aunt Tulip might give us her blessing, to be sure, but the inn was her husband's, and the truth would be hard to withhold when, if we *did* wed against his will, I

would be marching home with a bride, and no means of keeping her in meat and sup. I carefully cut my third nib without having touched the others to the paper, and had about decided to deny my father this important information until things had taken a more propitious turn, when there rang out a command in the room which brought to attention every person within hearing of the minatory tone.

“In the name of the King!” came the threat, “let no man leave this place under pain of death!”

I looked up quickly from where I sat, jerking my head from my letter in unison with every head in the ordinary, and beheld the thief-taker, Jacob Plimmer, standing before the counter behind which my uncle was cringing, and supported in the voicing of the mandate by a red-coated soldier at his side. At the low green door stood another redcoat. Doubtless the grounds without harbored still more.

Master Plimmer glared slowly about the room, either to thoroughly cow any temerarious enough to challenge his authority or to observe the location of certain unfortunates fallen beneath the displeasure of the Crown, and then directed his demands in a loud voice at Uncle Dickon.

“Are you the proprietor of this tavern—one,

Richard Tremaine?" he asked, although he knew the man as well as I did myself.

"I am, Jacob," said the landlord, rising automatically, and lifting his ginger wig from his head as though uncovering to authority.

"You are now giving refuge and succor here to a certain pirate, Lambertine by name; and in the name of the King I demand that you point him out, and hand him over to me."

Poor old Uncle Dickon was so aghast and generally confounded by such a charge that he was unable to gather himself together for reply. Finally he found his tongue, if not his wits, and cried:

"I am giving what, Jacob? What am I giving?" which drove the thief-taker to look again upon the warrant which he held in his hand.

"You are now," he read, tracing the words along with his finger, "giving refuge and succor; and if I were you, Richard, I would be careful how I denied it."

"Deny it!" cried the accused. "I certainly do deny it! I never heard the name of either of these men before. Don't come here with your shooters, Jacob Plimmer, and tell me what I am giving and who I am giving it to!"

"Wait a minute!" shouted Plimmer, rather astounded by this turn. "Listen to what I'm

telling you of! You got a pirate living here at the inn what's named Cap Lambertine. You know you have, and *I* know you have, so don't try and throw me off. Hand him here and all's well. Try to hide him—and watch out!"

"I never heard of no such person!" said my uncle.

"O yes you have," retorted Plimmer, "for you had a bill a-hangin' on your dresser the last time I was up here."

Uncle Dickon reached into the drawer before him and extracted the "sweet and pretty print" in question. "If you mean this," he said, "I ain't much of a reader and I disremember the name. But as for me ever having seen the man himself——" and he shook his round cropped head vehemently in the negative.

"You don't remember the name!" sneered the derisive thief-taker, while the soldier beside him grinned.

"I do not," said Uncle Dickon firmly. "But I remember that there was one hundred and fifty pounds for taking the man, and I know who got the money."

"Who?" asked Plimmer with tolerant interest.

"The Captain!"

A flutter of white on the steps which led to Joan's bower attracted my attention. She was standing back from the view of Plimmer and most

of the occupants of the tap, and was motioning to me to come to her. The soldier at the door could have seen her, but he was interested in the argument at the bar, and made no move when I slipped over silently to her side. She slid her hand in mine and reached her lips close to my ear.

"You must up the lane, and warn him if he should return before they are gone!" she whispered.

"Warn whom!" I asked.

"The Captain!" she said.

I stood, holding her hand, and staring stolidly at the redcoat by the door. I suppose I had known this for some time—perhaps, who can say, from the very first moment he had burst in at the door of The Silver Ship—but I had never said it, even to myself; and it was none the less a shock when I realized that his secret was shared by another. Did the landlord know, I wondered? And if he did, how far would he go to protect my friend?

"This Captain, now," Plimmer was saying. "What do you know of him except that his name is Rumm?"

"Why, nothing particular, except that he is known to all about here. Ask some of these men who have spent much time with him hereabout. Ask my nephew, Basil, for instance."

“And this nephew,” answered Plimmer. “Who may this nephew of yours be?”

It was at that moment that I distinctly heard the thud of a galloping horse coming up the lane from the south. The sudden grip of Joan’s fingers upon mine told me that she had heard it too; and I wondered if the sound had penetrated to anyone else in the tap. I was standing irresolute when Peter the Peddler’s high voice broke into the controversy.

“Master Plimmer,” he said, “I am always the first on the side of law and order I hope, and I feel a regard for you, as the saying is. Now, I’ve thought for some time as this here pirate was hanging about here, and I’ve watched out; and here’s the truth of it.”

As he talked I moved with offhand carelessness nearer the door. Joan watched me wide-eyed from her place of semi-concealment. The soldier before me was sufficiently interested in what was taking place at the far end of the room to overlook my gradual advance. Unfortunately, however, he still kept hold upon his musket. Now we were no great lovers of the redcoats and thief-takers in this countryside, and friends of all like the landlord, or the Captain, or even I, myself, would be protected from arrest as long as there was a man in the inn who could wield a weapon. But evidently Plimmer was unaware of this. If

necessary I would start any resistance which might prove needful, although a loaded musket is a nasty thing to face. My decision would be reached when I knew if the rider would turn to The Silver Ship or pass by upon the highroad. Rat-tat, rat-tat, rat-tat, I could hear his iron shoes upon the road.

"You all remember when this nephew of Dickon's came to the inn?" Peter was asking. "You all remember, too, how old Dickon used to tell about a visit he expected from his wife's grand family? You all thought this here young man was the son of Master Myles down the river, didn't you? Now, Master Plimmer, and Master Sills, and the rest, I'm going to tell you something you *don't* know. This here young man *ain't* Dickon Tremaine's relation at all! He's his wife's nephew! And it's through pride and upishness that he's being protected by the landlord here; for on the sea he's known as Captain Lambertine, and on the land he goes by his right name of—Ambrose de Bournonville!"

I was so aghast as I listened to this ridiculous invention of the little peddler's that I scarcely noticed the horseman had drawn before the door. It was therefore during the sudden hush of amazement which followed the unfolding of this fabrication that the door was pushed open and a servant appeared on the sill; a groom evidently, much

begrimed and sweated by the exertion of the ride. ,

Blinded by the candle-light he saw but me, it would appear, directly in his path; and believing me to be his host, (or so it would seem when I had sifted the matter later,) he called out in a penetrating voice:

“Master de Bournonville! Master de Bournon ——!”

“Secure that man!” cried Plimmer, pointing at me, and before I could think of resisting, I was grasped by the redcoat nearest the door. There was a general exclamation of amazement among those present which might, in another moment, have concentrated into a demonstration in my behalf, when concerns were again confounded by an unexpected ally.

The lone man at the empty table in the dull corner of the apartment rose, and let fall his cloak upon the chair behind him. There was that in his personality which instantly stemmed the tide of sound, until then gradually rising—and bringing every eye to focus on his person. His attitude was that of a master among serfs. Contempt was in every *nuance* of his voice, disdain in each gesture, scorn of his hearers in every word he uttered.

“You,” said he, indicating the thief-taker, “bring forward to me that peddling fellow who

just spoke. Soldier! Hold you that man at the door. I have heard many lies here to-night, and I doubt if any present but myself can speak the truth. I had no intention when I came here to-night of revealing myself to country gaffers and fly-by-nights, but the lies of this purse-cutting peddler have changed my mind for once. That man by the door may be, for all I know, a gallows-bird, but I doubt he is the Lambertine for whom you are looking. At least he is no de Bournonville, although he might well aspire to have the lie believed. To shield that name I am compelled to admit that I, myself, am some connection of the wife of this innkeeper, and the only living man who may lay just claim to the name of Ambrose de Bournonville."

The instant that this man hurled his name into the midst of the assemblage there was an answering cry from the table where sat the three sailors. As the candelabrum by which the room was lighted flung into darkness upon the floor, I caught a swift but vivid impression of the result of his words, each person in the central group thrown into brilliant saliance by the dying leap of the flame.

With a bark-like cry, "*Ah! Sei tu? Ben venga!*" the swarthy seaman had hurled himself at the self-styled de Bournonville. He must have sprung from off the table before which he had

been sitting, for my impression of him was as though he had been suspended above the heads of those seated about. Another mariner had made his objective the priming of the gun held by the soldier who was supporting the thief-taker. Plimmer himself had been overthrown by a sudden onslaught of the slight but agile peddler. I had wrenched myself free of the soldier who held me; the groom who had ridden post haste for his master was cringing against the wall in amazed trepidation at his intrusion upon such a fracas—and then all was darkness but for the feeble glow from the untended fire—while we were all at each others' throats as though our hearths and homes depended on the issue.

I fought for the very joy of fighting, and yet the victory, such as it was, proved hollow enough. The first soldier on whom I turned showed readily that his prowess, if he had any, lay entirely with the gun. Unarmed, he revealed little yearning for bodily combat, and went through the open door with greater celerity than my foot alone could have promoted. The groom did better, but I was on my mettle, and he joined the thief-taker in an exit as eccentric and yet as effective as anything ever devised in a pantomime. The remaining redcoat followed these two so promptly that he might have been a composite shadow of both, and there remained but de Bournonville himself.

A light was brought, and we found the man crushed beneath the knee of the sailor, with a dirk at his throat and the sweat of death on his forehead. The beetle-browed devil had been playing him like a cat with a mouse, but with no intention of showing him mercy at the end, I feel sure; and it took three of us to drag the assassin away when he realized we were going to interfere with the murder in which he was pleasantly engaged.

De Bournonville arose when the sailor was taken from him, and the one redeeming trait in the man's whole make-up appeared to be his fearlessness and self-possession in the face of a nasty death. I honestly believe that his gratitude at being saved was sharply tempered by the knowledge that he owed his life to those he considered his inferiors. It was remarkable to see how the virtue of pride had been exaggerated to a besetting vice. To those of us who had previously given him no cause for rancor he indicated a stiff-necked thanks. This was done, however, with a glance alone. He said but a few words as he departed to his groom's horse, but they were to the point.

"If this sea-robber, Lambertine, is skulking among you now let him heed my words. If not, let one of you tell him of them. Let him know that I, Ambrose de Bournonville, have had this warrant issued for him, and that I will hunt him

down to his hanging if it takes me the rest of my life. On that which my heart is set I do not fail. As to those who have attacked me to-night, doubtless they are the hirelings of this scoundrel. Were they within the confines of the law-abiding portion of this province they should be whipped at the cart's tail about the town, and hung out of hand. Here they may feel they are safe. Perhaps they are. Perhaps they are not. We shall see."

And he turned the nag's tired head with a cruel wrench of the bridle, and was out on the lane to the south, with never a look back, although he left a whining pack behind him as he rode.

It was a subdued and hushed concourse which filtered back inside *The Silver Ship*, greatly in contrast to the hurly-burly of a few moments before. It is not necessarily a cheerful reflection that you have aided in laying violent hands upon His Majesty's agents even though there was a wild and impetuous pleasure at the doing. Some of us, I am sure, already heard the drums in the barracks a half score leagues away beating the rat-tat of assembly; and I, for no apparent reason whatever, recalled how, when the wind set right from the bay at home, I had sniffed the stench of the prison-ship as she rocked in the ebbing tide.

Here and there a lip was puffed or an eye dis-

colored, but nobody boasted of his particular share of the victory. Even a tooth by the edge of the hearth remained unclaimed. We picked up the chairs which had gone down in the *mêlée*, righted the tables and relit the tapers. It was my opinion that, in the darkness, more than one personal grudge was either settled or begun, for the damage to us personally was considerable although I had escaped with slight bruises while accounting for two of our five antagonists. Sneed, the barber, was eventually induced to come out from under the dresser where he had taken refuge, and the blaze in old Gregory Martin's coat-tails was extinguished with slight loss—he having been knocked sprawling into the fireplace. Whether old Gregory's near incineration was due more to our resistance of authority or his opposition to the argument of Master Sills will always be a question in my mind, with the odds favoring the tobacconist.

Most of the guests who had secured rooms went to them immediately. Those who were not so fortunate chose tables, chairs, or floor-corners, and wrapped themselves in their cloaks. One or two made for the stables and the straw. I looked about for the three sailors, but they had evidently gone upon their way. The few who had always formed our nightly gathering also departed, leaving the dregs of a singed argument still in the air.

Peg, who had stood by the ale barrel through it all, and Joan, who had fled down the stairs at the first blow, poured us some unrequested and thankfully swallowed refreshment; and any late traveller stopping at our door would have noted nothing unusual except a landlord rather short of breath, a more than ordinarily thoughtful assistant, and perhaps an alert and smiling little peddler sipping his warm ale in the chimney corner.

When all was in its proper place again, I drew my love into the shadow of the stairs. I had now but one question to ask which seemed of paramount importance.

"Joan, how long have you known that Captain Rumm was an escaped pirate?"

She placed her hand on mine as though her gentle touch might assuage the sorrow I must feel at her reply.

"We do not *know* he is, Basil. Surely we, his dearest, closest friends, may lay aside this suspicion until we have the proof—if such there is."

"Not so," I said. "I must know all, and know it soon, that I may stand beside him when he needs a sword."

"We can question him together in the morning."

"I fear he will tell us nothing. But we can at least try."

"Let us ask Peter. He did not weave that lie about you without some cunning purpose."

I called the peddler to me, and we three went with a light among the flowers on the lower landing where we might be alone. Philemon was there before us, and he blinked at the light and he blinked at the peddler, but keen as his green eyes shone they were well matched in shrewdness by the glances of Peter the shallop-master.

"Peter," said I, "there is a rumor abroad that buccaneering ships run in the Delaware capes at seasons of the year, and to those who bear them news and foodstuffs, and carry back messages and such on their smaller boats, these sea-robbers pay well. I also understand that there is but one demand placed upon these river-runners who take the pirate's pay: that they shall keep the secrets of the clan. A loosened tongue, I think I've heard, spells—death."

"'Tis an old tale," said Peter.

"It is," said I. "But it may be that the older the story the greater its truth?"

"You have the learning, Master Basil," answered Peter. "I couldn't say myself."

"You lied about me to-night. A lie that would have taken me down the river a prisoner if it had gone undenied. I have done nothing to harm you. Why did you do this thing?"

"You will forgive me for that, Master Basil.

It was only a kind of jest. You see, I thought that Captain Rumm might be walking in any minute, and what would be more likely than that *he* would be mistaken for Lambertine? Such things have happened. Take Kidd. He's been carrion these many years, yet he was a brave gentleman who did no harm of any kind. He was the scapegoat for men at whom the Government winked—men who boasted in their liquor at the Governor's table of theft and murder, yet went their way unchallenged. I say to myself, I say: it will be best if this Plimmer and his—his soldiers"—and Peter the Peddler spat upon the ground at the hated word—"would take along someone who it would be easy to show the mistake of—later."

"But why me?"

"Well, they was going near your home. Your father, old Master Myles, would have had you out in a wink, so to tell; and in the meantime——" he paused thoughtfully, and reached forward to stroke the orange head of the purring Philemon.

"We are all in a bad way now," said Joan.

"Not us, lady," assured Peter. "This de Bournonville'll carry this fight no further. He's got a reason to catch this Lambertine, but he ain't the kind to sing loud about his losses. To get us all in trouble he'd have to march with the scum

of Plimmer and his likes; and while he'd use that kind if it suited his will, he'd sooner take six inches of a knife's blade than show himself by them. It was for that that I made him declare himself to-night. He feared you might be arraigned under his name. No! You'll hear no more of this if I know anything. Plimmer will make a deal of noise, of course; but at the bottom there's worse than him. A thief-taker owes his job to the thieves he catches, after all; and it don't do for him to go too far."

"Do you mean to say that this Jacob Plimmer is not honest?" I asked.

"Oh, bless you, no, Master Basil!" Peter assured me quickly. "He's as good as any, and may be better than most; but he ain't a-going to injure hisself by being *too* honest. That wouldn't hold with reason. And Jacob's reasonable! Very reasonable!"

"You got the best of him to-night," said I, thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Peddling Peter, and then apropos of nothing, he reiterated casually, "He's a very reasonable man, is Jacob."

Personally, we were thoroughly in agreement on that.

We talked shortly on several other kindred matters, and he rose to go, for he was spending the night on board his shallop. Joan asked him:

"Have you any reason to believe that Captain Rumm and Captain Lambertine were ever, in any way, confused—or associated?"

"Lord bless you, lady," Peter was always lavish with his benedictions, "I'd be the last to learn of it if they were. I *have* done a little river hauling for Captain Rumm some time ago, and he treated me good, and I wish to see no harm come to him. That's all. This here's a fine cat you got. It's as yellow as anything now, ain't it?" And away strolled Peddling Peter, while Philemon escorted him up the stairs with his back arched in approval.

We climbed the steps to the ordinary quietly, that we might not disturb the slumbers of those reclining in distorted postures about the room. Peggie was putting the finishing touches to the furnishings ere she too went to a well-earned rest. Joan and she and I stopped near the steps to exchange a whispered word or two of good-night.

"It's been an evening not to be forgot in a hurry," said Peg, wiping her hot face on her apron.

"It surely has," said I. "Will you ever forget old Martin, and the smoke coming out of his coat?"

We all three chuckled at the remembrance.

"Master Sneed was in a way, too," said Peg. "It'll give them old clowns something new to talk over for a while, anyway. That one soldier

fetches a blow with his gun-barrel on one of them sailors as he won't forget in a hurry. I heard him grunt like he was killed. But the lobster-back didn't last long afterwards. Their two muskets is down in the back cellar under the cut wood."

"What became of the warrant Plimmer was reading? Did he take it with him?"

"It ain't none of my business, of course," said Peg. "But we was all a-hunting of it as soon as things was put to rights, because Master Dickon said it should be found and returned to the authorities. And while the landlord was helping us to search I seen the seal on it hanging down from under the back of his waistcoat. He must have stuffed it there for safe keeping in the heat of the fuss."

"Had he forgotten it?" asked Joan innocently.

Peggie and I laughed.

"It was a great night," I said. "In some ways the Captain will be sorry he missed it when he hears the tale."

"Save us!" said Peggie. "I quite forgot the Captain. He gave me a turn to-night, though. He came in about a half-hour ago, and went to his room. It's the first time I ever seen him so, but he was reeling drunk! He gave me a turn, he did, as he went up the stairs."

"Rumm in liquor? Impossible! Wasn't it his boast that his name would never put him down?"

"It had him by the ankles to-night, anyway."

"It seems that almost anything might happen to-night," said Joan. "Perhaps he is celebrating a fortunate termination to his journey."

"Perhaps. And Peggie has served enough liquor to recognize its effect. But just the same, it is hard to believe."

"It was for me, too," said the barmaid. "Well, good-night, both. I'm to bed in the attic."

Joan's little room was on the landing above mine, and on the same level with that of the Captain's. I took her to her door, and in the shadow thrown by the candle she yielded to my ardent embrace; and we lingered, as who has not, making whispering plans for the morrow, and of the telling of the story which she had promised. It seemed I could not let her lithe form go from out my arms. From her silken hair, which blent with the dusky screen of modest night, there thrilled a perfumed touch upon my lips. The Silver Ship was still—so still that the beating of the heart strained against my own seemed almost audible. A mouse in the wainscot scurried away with a soft patter of dislodged plaster. At the sound, slight as it was, Joan crept the closer in my arms. Her lips were crushed on mine——

We were both holding our breath, and listening. There was a sound—a low murmuring buzz, like far-away insects on a drowsy summer night

—and it was near to us along the hall. Without a word we stood apart to listen; and making nothing of it I silently reached for the candle where it stood upon the landing, and raising it high, threw a wavering light along the passage.

It was Philemon!

He was crouching before a door further down the hallway, purring with the tone of a great simmering kettle. Softly, hand in hand, we stole to watch him at his midnight gambol. He did not deign to notice our approach. Instead he seemed to purr but the louder, and rub his orange head against the floor, and scratch with noiseless claws at the sill of the closed portal, with every evidence of feline satisfaction. As I supported the light, and Joan reached down to stroke his sleek fur, his sinuous form avoided her touch with a pliancy which brought his yellow side against the floor. As he rose again his body flashed in the light a deep but brilliant tinge.

For the great beast was purring and playing in a stream of warm blood which ran with a drip—drip—drip from beneath the Captain's door!

CHAPTER IX

TELLING OF HOW THE CAPTAIN MAY JOURNEY NO MORE

IT was dawn of the day, and Joan and I stood gazing from the Captain's window over the crest of the waving pines as the gray of the promised dawn turned to the warm gold of fulfillment. At last the weary hours of darkness were behind us; hours in which a grim struggle waged, fierce and silent, over the calm and motionless form upon the bed. Shoulder to shoulder we had stood—the landlord, galvanized into forgetfulness of his forebodings; his wife, with her tender sympathy; Peggie, with ready hands and tears upon her cheeks; and Sills, the chemist, keen now as his own scalpel, and cunning of hand, with strange potions and dark nostrums, ever active yet never excited—and eventually turning to us, trembling but triumphant, with the bullet in his hand.

I had stood by to assist as he cut for the lead, while Joan on her knees at the side of the bed pressed close the Captain's limp and lifeless hand against her pallid cheek. When we had roused from the horror of the blood upon the sill I had thrown myself against the door, to find that the

falling body prevented my entering the room. With what care I dare show in my haste I reached his side, and together we had raised him to his bed. As I tore back his clothing from the wound Joan had awakened the house. Sills, who lived hard by, was sent for in a twinkling; and while we awaited his coming Joan moistened his lips with wine while I sought by pressure to dam the flow of blood. She had placed her arm beneath his head, and was tilting the glass to his lips, when he gave the only sign of life we saw for many hours. He raised his hand gently, and pressed back the liquor from him, saying at the moment—in a whisper, but very distinctly—three times: "*Seigneur Dieu! Seigneur Dieu! Seigneur Dieu!*" like that; and then his head had jerked back, and he lay like a corpse.

It was decided that no more could be done for him, and I had begged to be allowed to watch by his side until morning. And when they all had left us two alone, Joan had tiptoed back to me, and we had waited for the dawn together through hours which took eons to creep by.

When the sun's rays had put the candle to shame we stood above him as he lay, trusting to find some sign to give us hope; but aside from his faint fitful breathing he was as before; still with a cheerful calm upon his face, in the posture of a man who had dropped to sleep, to wake again

upon a joyous morn—pale, but composed; and if he suffered from the wound it did not show so on his face—but still! So deadly still he lay!

Joan sat in a chair by the pallet, her hands clasped before her and her eyes far away.

“I was thinking,” she said softly—and paused; while I turned quickly as she spoke, for we had both been silent for so long. “I was thinking—of what the Captain said last night before he left upon his journey. Do you remember?”

“What, particularly, do you mean?”

“He said—and somehow it impressed me then—‘before the dawn colors the sky above the pines I will have been nearer Heaven this day than I ever hoped to win!’”

“Yes. I remember now,” I said. “I blame myself for this. If I had had wit enough to give him the ring these many days now gone, he would be well to-day.”

“Perhaps. One can’t be sure. He did not blame you, certainly it is foolish to blame yourself. Did you find the token about him?”

“No. It was gone. He must have lost it in his wounded state.”

“I don’t think that,” said Joan. “With the instinct of a wounded animal he crept, but partly conscious, to his home. This intuition would have been stronger still toward the ring and curl against which he had matched his life. It’s gone

because it has served the purpose for which it was given. He has seen his love, and given it back to her. This ride, which ended so disastrously for him, saw in its course his dearest hopes begun."

"I will try to think so. At least that is a satisfaction. Sills feels he has a chance, and if care can do aught for him he will recover faster than man has yet. To-morrow, who knows, he will tell us all about it."

Sills came shortly after daybreak with Sneed, the barber, to help him care for the patient. Joan and I hung over the wounded man for a few moments in silent prayer and farewell, and then she went to her room to rest, and I to the tap for a dram before sleeping. In the corner of the room, wrapped about in a shabby cloak, sat Peter the Peddler, evidently awaiting the latest word from the sick man. I carried my liquor over to his table, and seeing that he was supplied with the same, gave him an account of the finding of the Captain, and all which had followed. He listened with that quick perception which anticipated much I told, and when I had made an end he pulled long at his glass and shook his head moodily.

"The Captain has friends," he said; "and if they lay hands on the man who did him this turn ——" and he shook his head again.

"Perhaps he knows who it was. When he re-

gains his senses I will make it a point to ask him who fired the shot."

"I don't know who fired the shot," said Peter, "but I know who paid for the powder and lead; and he's a bold man who quarrels with him."

"Who was it then?"

"Why, Ambrose de Bournonville! Who else?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Think it! And after what he said last night! It's as plain as the nose on your face. Listen! You're the Captain's friend, and I don't mind saying a word to you that I'd burn before I'd tell to some. You know that the Captain's right name is Jonathan Lambertine, and that he's wanted by the Crown for a trick or two of sea-stealing. I say you know it, because if you don't you're about the only one that's ignorant this mile around, after last night's doings. But why, I ask you, and how did he buccaneer—him being a gentle born man, and true? It may have been something in this way: he'd been a soldier on land and sea, and at one time he fell into the hands of the Frenchies. He got away, but he held a grudge against them that he ain't got rid of yet. Now, when he got back to England he decided that the best way to ease up his feelings and do the most damage all 'round was to man a ship under a letter of marque, and chase them a bit on his own. He got the ship—there ain't

never no trouble in that—and he took several prizes into home ports, and give the King his share; and then, when he was running, innocent like, down the Main, with no notion of nothing to spoil his fun, England and France up and signs for peace.”

He paused, and I slipped in a query. “Is this that you tell me what you *think* happened, Peter, or is it what you *know* to be true?”

“If this ain’t the exact truth, every word of it, Master Basil, it ain’t far enough off of it to be a lie. How did I learn it? Well, I listen ’round a lot, for a fact; and a ship has got a lot of sailors, and one of them is like enough to talk. Well, as I say, here’s the Captain up and running down the Main, looking for *parlez-vous* merchantmen—and a good war all gone to hell on shore. It seems he met a Frenchie of a noontime, and being a three-decker and well manned, the merchantman stood for battle. There ain’t never been nothing like it in the sea, so I’m told, with the two of them pounding away at each other. But at three bells of the second dog-watch Lambertine served dinner on the merchantman’s gold plate to all as was left of his officers and crew. The ship he sunk, and her people was landed at Porto Sabatino; and it was here that he learned for the first time that he was fighting on his own, and the war done. He set sail for home at once,

slapping a couple of old friends on the way for luck, I suspect; and when he came near to our coast he learned that the King's ship was looking for him. It looked like the same case as Kidd: something had gone wrong and somebody had to hang for it; so why not Lambertine? He sent in letters by a smack he met, and put out again to wait on the reply. He stood strong with the Government, and it looked like he would get a pardon when an enemy of his stepped in, and stirred things up against him. Matters were slow in coming to a head, and he made for our coast to take on supplies and stuff ——”

“Which is where you come in, Peter, eh?”

“Me!” said he in astonishment. “Lord, no, sir! I ain't in this tale at all. Well, he was making out of the Delaware Bay when he run slap into a British frigate, the *Success*, and a grand ship she is, and no mistake. She calls on the Captain to lay to, but he's for making a run for it. They both got under way for the chase, when by dumb luck—just when the *Merry Christmas* was slipping away in the murk—the *Success* with a bow-chaser picks off his main halyards, and before he can cut his snarl he's boarded. Then come a fight! But Lambertine's fifty-four didn't last long with near three hundred of the frigate, although the Captain held a corner of the quarter-deck against the mate of the King's ship, each

armed with a clasp-knife and it took a score to pry them apart."

"The Captain once told me something of that," I said. "He told me because I know that mate well."

"Then you know a man," said Peter.

"He is my brother, Roger Myles!"

"God bless us all," said Peter. "I never thought of it before, but that's the name, sure enough. He has certainly proved himself a man of courage and sense. You see, him and his captain and the rest of the *Success* saw how matters stood, and they wanted no harm to come to as brave a man as Captain Lambertine had proved himself to be—him as has fought in more wars than I got fingers and toes! So they sailed the *Merry Christmas* and landed the crew and all along the coast near here, with orders to spread and disappear. Then they got the Crown to call for the Captain to surrender himself, and stand a small fine. Lots of real bad pirates has come in on them conditions, Master Basil, and it's good for the trade to have them on land again."

"But would the Captain not meet the fine?"

"Oh, he'd have give a score of time the price they was asking of him, but there was something else come up to stop it. You'll excuse me, Master Basil, knowing me as you do for a right-meaning, honest man, but I misdoubt if I should bring the

name of a lady into this, which I must do to tell you more."

"While I am not one likely to speak lightly of a lady, you must judge for yourself in this, Peter."

"If you will excuse me, then, I'll speak of her as—let me see, as—de Bournonville!"

"Very good," said I. "The name shall be Madame, or possibly Mademoiselle, de Bournonville. And was it possible also that this lady was of French extraction?"

"If she was it was some while ago. There is no doubt that she was born in this land, but her father was French—or his father. Well, whoever it was as first sailed here, the lady in question—unmarried, you understand—took it into her mind to go back to France for a visit, and away she sailed as soon as this war I speak of was over. Some I have heard say that she went for large sums of money that came to her through her family, although she had much here, but whether or no she stayed but a few weeks, bring over on her return a man relative by the same name as herself, who we will call ——"

"Monsieur de Bournonville!"

"*Monseigneur de Bournonville!*" corrected a voice behind me gently, and I found Joan at my elbow. I turned quickly, but Peter had seen her approach and seemed anxious that she too might share in all he had to tell. Perhaps, I did not

know, she might have been there listening all the time.

"Call him as you will," said Peter, "he was a wicked man. They tell me, those who have been there, that French lords treat their poor like the dirt."

"You should know, Peter, for you are a Frenchman born!"

"I!" said the peddler.

"You!"

"Well," said he, and shook his head, "I don't know how you know, but if you say so surely I must admit I am. But Frenchies are not loved too much about these Colonies, and I've been here so long I thought that no one remembered."

"It was not that I was told," said Joan. "I heard you talking in your native tongue to the Italian sailor in the tap last night."

"It's true. He speaks a little French, and I a little Italian—so we converse. He is rough to look upon but well born, and a great man in his own country. Well, I have said that the poor of France are treated badly, and from what I can learn of this de Bournonville it must be true. To pass the time of day with him was to seek a taste of his crop. The servants in Mademoiselle's home—the old servants, mind you!—were beaten about and treated so that there was none to act the part of a man before his whim. He brought

with him a servant of his own, a great one-eyed fellow, who acted the spy upon all, and my lady as well. This lady has no parents, and some have said that this relative, although he claims a near kinship with her, would wed her for her wealth. Others think he desires to wed a sister of Made-moiselle, and but desires to cow the elder into making him great loans or gifts. However this may be, this lady and her kinsman were passengers on the merchantman that Captain Lambertine captured. When he heard that their wish was to come to a port near here he made the offer—having seen the lady's face—that he would bring them here in state. They remained with him, having little choice in the matter possibly, and each hour of the journey drew this lovely lady and the Captain closer to one another."

"Ah, I think I see the end of your story now!"

"I would think so. You can guess how, as their love increased, so did the hatred between Lambertine and the Frenchman. Now it came around, after they were landed here, that this—this ——"

"Monseigneur de Bournonville?"

"Just so! It came about that while he was French by birth, like me, and a landowner there, that he had been much in England, and knows certain members of the Government. It is he, as he admitted last night, who has had handbills

pardon, and rewards offered for Lambertine; but then on the *Success* are sailing to get a pardon for the Captain. 'Best lie by until they arrive,' says wisdom, so the Captain cuts his hair and trims a beard, and comes here where it's quiet, and possibly handy to Mademoiselle."

"And she knew he was coming to The Silver Ship," I cried excitedly, "and came to see us. She mistook me for the Captain's brother, and gave me a message for him. Then her relative came later with his servant—and made the same mistake. He has cause to remember me," I said, and then I told him about the fight. He slapped his palm down upon the table when I had finished.

"I'd advise you to kill either of those men on sight," he said with conviction. "If there ever were two devils on earth, it's the one-eyed man and his master. It was de Bournonville who was there that night, and no hireling. 'Tis the very work he'd love, and none would carry his sword but himself."

"It was a great battle while it lasted," I said.

"I'm a peaceful riverman by trade," he mused, "but I surely would have given a year of my time on this earth to have been with you that night—with a knife in my hands. You did well to get away from them. It was him what brought up Plimmer and the redcoats this night past, and

you heard the manner in which he spoke to honest men? ”

“ Is his name really de Bournonville? ”

“ So he claims.”

“ And this beautiful cousin—she really was beautiful, Joan—must be Aunt Tulip’s one relative by the name in this country? ”

“ She and her sister, yes.”

“ Do the two resemble one another? ”

“ Bless you, no! ” said Peter. “ The young one’s as plain as my hand. But bright, I understand. Several years ago I brought them both down the river in my boat. The one was very grand, but the other aided me to steer the craft, and talked to me in my own tongue the day through.”

“ Where is their homestead? ”

“ I’m not so certain. Well back from the river, I think.”

“ And the Captain went to see her there last night, and met de Bournonville when he was riding back, I suppose.”

“ Very likely. Do you remember them three sailors what stop here on and off? ”

“ I certainly do! ”

“ The three of them is a part of his crew of the *Merry Christmas* what kind o’ hang about and look after him till things clear up. Seeing the soldiers come up they stayed here at the inn.

Usually they would be near Lambertine on the road, and his wounding would never have happened but for that."

"They certainly hate de Bournonville. The dark foreign one nearly had him gone."

"They were surprised that he was here himself, for they've sworn to do for him, and he knows it. He put too much faith in the soldiers—Pah! A company of them ain't worth one honest man."

"They might have seen him even if he had not spoken."

"They might. *I* did, although he sat back in the dark, and kept his hand over his face. But I am peaceful, I am, and I wanted no trouble, so I held my tongue."

"What name did Lambertine sail under? Not Lambertine, certainly, for you did not recognize it when I read it to you from the handbill."

"Captain George. I'd done hauling for him under that name long before he was ever a pirate, if he ever was, and I liked him real well. I certainly hated to bring them bills up the river."

"Peter, I'm tired and going to get some rest. You have told me almost everything I wanted to know, and I thank you. If I can ever repay you in any way, call upon me. Meanwhile, one more rum and a bit of venison?"

"Yes," insisted Joan, "and while Peg gets it,

there is something I want to learn. When this lady came here to see the Captain, and took Basil for his brother, she asked him if he had a brother at sea. He has, you know—the mate of the *Success*—and he told her yes. Then she inquired his name, and when Basil told her it was Roger she laughed, and gave a message for him which was really for the Captain. Why did she laugh at the name Roger, and immediately think that it was the Captain of whom he spoke? Was he known as Roger George?”

After a little thought Peter nodded vigorously. “He never used Roger as a name, I know, but this same lady had been on board the *Merry Christmas* long enough to pick up words used by sea-folks. The black flag of the Spanish Main is known to the sailors as the ‘Jolly Roger,’ and as she maybe didn’t expect you’d come right out with the name of George or Lambertine, she must have thought you’d made a sort of joke between the name and the flag he flew—if he did.”

“If that was a joke, believe me, it almost cost the Captain dear! Now, Peter, you won’t mind if, when he recovers sufficiently, I—or Master Basil—tell him all that you have told us, will you?”

“No,” said Peter. “I won’t mind—because the Captain told me that if anything happened to

him I was to tell each or both of you just this. And that's why I've hung about as long as I have this morning."

"Peter," said I, "for an honest man you are entirely too intimate with this pirate!"

"Well," said Peter, cutting into the meat, "you're pretty thick with him yourself, Master Basil, if it comes to that."

I never was quite so intimate with the Captain as I was in those first few days after his wounding. Joan and I just sat beside him, and waited, waited, waited. At first he lay like the dead; and then he tossed and pulled at the covers, and if his nose was not as sharp as a pen, he was like the dying Falstaff in so far as he "babbled of green fields," and a hundred other subjects beside. All of the night on which he suffered the hurt, and all of the following day I stayed at his side, with but a few hours of broken sleep and my conversation with the peddler excepted. The night that came after that Sills feared for him woefully, and I remained at his bed until long after the next midday had gone. His immediate danger had passed by then, and I took to my rest in a thankful spirit. After my devotion, however, I regretted that when his eyes opened upon reason I was not to be beside him, but it so came about that Aunt Tulip received his first lucid request—and awoke me on the morning of the

third day with the message that I come to his side.

He was very weak from fever, and the loss of blood, but despite Sills, my aunt, Joan, and the rest of us, he would have a pillow beneath his head and some words with me alone. When the door closed upon us two, and I had sat me down facing him, my hand in his, he asked how long he had been so, and if he would recover, and when. I told him it was the third day of immurement, and that if he proved a submissive patient he might be about in six weeks. He lay a long time silent then, after which he bade me tell him the hour, which I did.

"It is then, if I understand you rightly," said he after digesting what he had been told, "in the forenoon of Saturday?"

"It is," I assured him.

"Saturday is always a fortunate day for me," he said. And then: "Reach me my clothes, and I will be up!"

"Be up!" I cried. "Not for this fortnight will your feet touch the floor."

"Sills has you frightened," he answered. "I am a better man than both of you this minute."

And with that, he threw off the coverlet with a sudden and unlooked-for move, and attempted to raise himself and step from the bed. Fifteen

minutes later, when he had opened his eyes and regained his senses through our united ministrations he was more contrite. Sills told him that if he lay quite still, and took the nasty drench prepared for him, he might have me to talk again for five minutes in the afternoon. Evidently recognizing his weakened state, he agreed, providing that I would search out Peter the Peddler and have him tell me all. When I told him that that was already done he nodded, and begged to be allowed to sleep.

When I returned to him later in the day Joan was at his side. He indicated that she was to remain, and it was noticeable that he was conserving his energy to tell us something. To this end we both did all possible to anticipate anything he might attempt to say at length.

"Both Joan and I know all that the peddler knows. That night you left us to attempt to see Mademoiselle, were you successful in seeing her?"

"Yes," he indicated. It was in this form of questioning that we felt we could save him strength.

"Undoubtedly she was both amazed and enraptured at your arrival. Her cousin was here looking for you with a warrant and some soldiers. Thus you were safe with her. Did you (I presume you wish us to know of these most delicate

and personal affairs, otherwise I would not venture), did you renew your vows of the past?"

"We did."

"While you were with her were you surprised by her kinsman, or did you meet him as you returned?"

"On my return."

"Did words pass between you?"

"No."

"Did he simply draw, and fire upon you?"

"He had a servant with him who shot me."

"Was he a great ponderous one-eyed fellow, with a fine air of egotism?"

"Yes."

"I know the scoundrel well. But he was not here with de Bournonville that night."

"He was left, I think, to guard the house, and to spy upon the lady," said the Captain.

"Like enough," said I. "And the groom who came for his master was sent because you were with the lady. It was a warning to de Bournonville to hurry home."

"Exactly," said Joan. "Now, Captain, I suppose it is not possible that the lady could know that you lie wounded here, and doubtless some meeting has been arranged by you two for the very near future. It is to this purpose that you have called us here? Have you thought of a way that either Basil or I may assist?"

"Yes," he said, after a long pause.

"Before you speak," said I, "let me say one word. I have felt, since the night you were hurt, that on me there lies a great responsibility. It was through my stupidity that the token, on which so much happiness depended, was withheld from you. Any amend which I can make I hereby pledge myself to undertake, regardless of any trials or dangers that may befall in the doing. Now, if you have a plan let us share it."

He reached from the white covers and took my hand in his. He hesitated, as though to summon all his strength for the relation, and a look of yearning upon his haggard face would have led me to charge, at his wish alone, upon a regiment. His voice was low—almost a whisper it was—but his plan and his ideas were sharp-cut and decisive. Both Joan and I must lean close above him to gather all.

"This day is Saturday. This night it grows dark soon, for it wants but four days to Christmastide. Have you ever heard of a little river to the north of Penn's city in which the Indians claim yellow fish are netted? This stream lies in a thickly wooded vale, but there is a path, well worn, which winds beside it through the trees. High up upon the northern bank in a great cleared park of lawns and shrubbery stands my lady's house. To-night, when the sun shall have sunk

a while, from there she will ride forth on her horse beside these waters. Perhaps a league from her home there stands a gray stone building beside this stream, in which there lives a monk—a holy man from Germany. Although of a differing denomination, the work of charity and kindness has bred good faith between the daughters of the house of de Bournonville and him. To this asylum she will direct her flight. I was to meet her there, or perchance upon the road to it, close upon the hour of eight. There, if she changes not her mind in the matter, we were to be wed by this Father Kelpius—and be away with all speed for my safety's sake to a new hiding-place, until my pardon comes, or him who hounds me dies by other hands."

"Why other hands?"

"I cannot kill the kinsman of the woman I love—and well he knows, and takes advantage of my thralldom. Say, can you find this spot I speak of? That night I was led to it by love alone, nor can I tell you much to aid you on the way. To-night duty must be your guide."

"What is the name of the stream? I must make inquiries upon my way."

"I know," interrupted Joan. "I have been beside it a score of times, and have seen this monastery among the trees. It is known to the Indians as the Wissa-hic-hannah, and to gain there

you must first cross the Delaware at the ford above, or boat your mount over from here to be quicker. Until you return I will see that a ferryman waits you on the other side. All the country through which you go lies well south and west of us, and upon the Pennsylvania side. If you leave here two hours before sundown you can well make the journey on time."

"That will be the least of it," I said. "I do not fear being lost; but what am I to do when I meet the lady? Tell her of the Captain's injury naturally, but what then?"

"That she will decide," said Lambertine.

"Will there be danger of being intercepted by de Bournonville or his men?" asked Joan.

"They know that the Captain has met the lady once, and they will be on the watch for the second rendezvous, doubtless. They may have no idea how badly they wounded you."

"There is danger," said the Captain.

"Or it might be that the lady has been locked away for fear of just such a flight, and none will be there to meet Basil?"

"True. But I have thought of that also."

"Still another thing," Joan persisted. "She may not recognize Basil again; and expecting you, and being approached by a stranger, she may ride away in a fright, or at least not listen to his advances."

"That I also have arranged."

"How?"

"I am an old campaigner. I have not flown at this adventure as heedlessly as you think. I was leaving the inn forever that day because I knew, through Peter, that de Bournonville was coming for me with Plimmer that night. I, at once, saw the advantage of seeking my happiness immediately I received from you the ring, outwitting my enemy who would be seeking me here. The peddler, my friend and lookout, understood this; and knew that if I could see my lady and so arrange, this night would be our wedding eve, and to this arrangement were my sailor allies to guard the road and watch for me to-night. I cannot reach them to say that you, not I, will keep the tryst. They know, of course, that I lie wounded, but also they know I am tenacious. They will expect me. As for the lady, none will dare lock her away. It is I whom they will attempt to stop."

"And if she remembers me not?"

"Any trials, any dangers, did you not say? What is the hour? three? Joan, sweet sister, bring here your sharp shears. For with your help, the double of Captain Rumm will gallop this night, even if the Captain may journey no more!"

CHAPTER X

TELLING OF HOW I JOURNEYED IN THE CAPTAIN'S STEAD

IT wanted but a few minutes to the strike of four, and already the room wherein I stood before Captain Rumm was lighted by the aid of a candle or two. Dusk and the hour of my departure had arrived simultaneously. Joan was kneeling beside his bed, her dark head close to his pillow, that she might view me from the same angle as did the patient. Evidently they felt that Joan's efforts were not without success. On the table lay my thick club of hair, while the back of my head was shingled short like Lambertine's. His long cloak of courtly cut hung from my shoulders, his plumed hat became my brow, and his rapier and pistols were the arms I bore. Most important of all, perhaps, his mare, Blackbird, awaited me at the inn block.

"If you could raise a beard within the hour," said the Captain, "you would be hung out of hand, Basil, and in a goodly cause. Never did I realize all my worthy points until I saw myself reflected in you. Sweet Mistress Joan, how did you resist me when I sauntered by, and give your

hear to the keeping of this worthy, but unpretentious, Basil?"

"It does seem strange," admitted Joan. "But when, think you, will his hair be long enough to do into a queue again?"

"That makes but little matter," he assured her. "To-night he walks in the habiliments of glory. Dangers, to be sure, press upon him; but he is a man, and weaponed bravely. None in the dusk will mistake you but for me. Ride out, and dare as I would dare; so, when the sun rises in the morning, you should be here beside my bed to tell me that my lady's safe."

"I will be here," I said.

"While you are alone, be guided by the best judgment you can muster. When you are with her, be guided in everything by what she says. Good-bye, dear friend, and fail me not. I trust in you as I would trust myself."

I bade farewell to Joan in the whistling wind at the door of *The Silver Ship*, and promised to be careful, and look to myself first of all. Then shortly I was standing on the far bank of the river, with the boatman who was to await my return. Thus Blackbird and I began the first leg of our journey.

The night was dark, with a flying rack of heavy storm-clouds just atop of the pines—or so they seemed—keeping pace with me as I galloped to-

ward the south. Now and again at rare intervals they broke away sufficiently to allow a waxing moon to cast our soaring shadow on the road before us. The turf by the side of the rutted highway was frost-firm and springy, so we made good time, the borrowed mare and I, until a light above the little town of Frankford bade me dismount at a road-mender's cottage to ask my way in the dark.

He was a young man, this road-mender, and he evidently trusted few who travelled after the sun went down, for he answered my knock at his door with a hammer in his hand, and the anxious face of his wife—a babe in her arms—peering out behind his shoulder. Fortunately he had heard of the Wissa-hic-hannah, but it was a distance from his home, and all the advice I received for the silver penny I threw him was to bend to the west at the second crossroad below the town. I think I ruffled it a bit in the Captain's style—such is the effect of gay apparel—and as I rode down the turnpike I remember looking back, and noting that both he and his slattern were watching me into the darkness. It did not occur to me until afterwards that he might have matched my silver coin for a gold one given to watch for me as I galloped by; but it was too late to repair this mistake when I had finally decided such was the case. However, knowing nothing better to do, I took

the westward road at the second crossing, and trotted half a league further—until I came to a white sign-post beside a cold smithy's forge.

Having no light, and judging the night still early and my way short, I set the mare to crop the frost-nipped grasses beside the beaten track, and sat myself down on the door-sill of the smith's shed to await a rift in the clouds, and light enough to read the towns designated by the post. It was cold, and I drew my loaned cloak close about me. The wind blew briskly from the direction in which I had come, with the sole purpose, evidently, of chilling my neck where Joan had so thoroughly plied her shears. Finally the scud parted long enough for me to gather that to my direct left lay Broad Axe, and upon the way before me, Andorra. Having heard of neither place before I decided to leave the choice to fortune, and was for allowing the mare to take whichever road she wished, when I detected the clatter of hoofs down the wind from the way I had come.

My natural instinct would have been to await these riders, for the sound suggested there were three at least, and inquire my path from them; but a caution born of the memory of the Captain's wound bade me keep well ahead of this cavalcade. In two minds, I finally mounted and took the Andorra road for a quarter of a mile, or thereabouts, and then drew up to learn if I had

chosen the more popular path. A few minutes of listening told me that I had, for the mounted party was still pressing in my direction. I recognized it to be the same that I had heard before, as—so keen to grasp details is one under fear of pursuit!—a slight click as of a loosening shoe was evident as the hoofs struck the frozen earth. I saw to the priming of my pistols, tested the draw of my rapier from its scabbard, and setting my cloak more easily about, trotted on along the way. A black patch of woods lay directly ahead. From the shade of that perhaps it might be well to look back along the road. I could then better judge if I should stand or ride.

As I drew up beneath the chestnut trunks the bare branches weaving above me in the blustering breeze threw blot enough upon the ground that I was well protected from the eyes of any who might even be seeking such a horseman; and to aid me further, at the moment when the party of five came into view about a turn, perhaps three hundred yards behind me, the moon sailed out into a wide gap in the scattering clouds, lighting the highway where they rode, and accentuating my protecting shadows.

Four of the horsemen were light-riding, well-mounted men, with holsters at their saddle-bows and a sword or two among them. The fifth, and foremost, was a great fellow on a bay mare, who

looked down, every step or two, at the beast's near fore-hoof where the loosening shoe clicked forth a summons to the smith. The bay I recognized at a glance, as would all lovers of horse-flesh; but the rider I distinguished even more quickly, and I turned the Blackbird's head with a twist that sent us away as though we had been shot from a gun.

The leader of the group was de Bournonville's serving-man—the one-eyed assassin of the Captain's!

They were but ambling in their gait, and unaware that I was near, so that for the first hundred yards through the woods I widened the gap between us considerably. But the trees soon ceased to dot the highway, and I flashed out into the clearing with the moon hanging steady above. The wind being from them they did not hear my clatter, but as they came through to where the trees were sparse they descried me as I flew down the road, and instantly were away in pursuit.

Their advantage seemed for a moment to be heavy. They were five to one, probably as well mounted as I, as well armed also, and familiar with every step of the road. For me to stand was futile, and while the moon was lighting my path, for the time I knew not if I was heading toward another party of their fellows, or to some form of *cul-de-sac* in which I might readily be trapped. I had been turning away from the river

for some time, but a fear drove over me nevertheless that a ford might lie along this trail, in which I would prove a floundering target for their bullets.

My mount seemed to scent the danger as well as I, and the great muscles beneath me tensed and flexed as the earth whirled behind me. At a curve I glanced back and saw that the rider had made place in the lead for two of the others who were preparing to discharge their firearms. Almost as I looked the smoke rose, and a sput-sput of the reports blew down to me on the wind; but the lead flew wild, and almost immediately these two—being probably the more poorly mounted—fell a bit behind in the race.

On we tore, with the wind of our celerity whistling about our ears. Now and again a farmhouse loomed in the murk, and once I flew by a wagon creaking along, the driver crying after me until distracted by the thunder of my pursuit. Several times the road forked before me, but I kept ever to the westward. Once we drove near a mill, beside which tumbled a swift torrent. I had just time to glimpse the moonlit swirl when Blackbird's flying hoofs boomed hollow over the wooden bridge. I'll warrant that the miller was at the window by the time the gray mare repeated the tattoo, and his wife was likely at his side when the second of the riders crossed. I

heard the serving-man's clangor behind me, and that of one other in the chase; but my mare was now reaching into a stride that but few could match, and it was evident that, from a group of riders of but a few minutes before, they had now turned into five individuals fairly well scattered over the course we had come.

The loose shoe on the gray mare was ever in my mind, but the evidence, so plain in a brisk trot, was completely lost in the thud of a gallop. I could only hope that the poor animal might lame or stumble, for the truth was gradually dawning upon me that while I was running away from all but one of the other horsemen, and could likely outdistance him before long, the one-eyed fellow had already halved the original intervening space between us, and was gaining at every stride.

Suddenly before me there loomed a steep incline. Up went the Blackbird, but I felt the lack of resiliency in the beast, and made over my mind in an instant. The first rider was well ahead of the pack. If I turned at the hill-crest and met him with my sword it might be that I could do him sufficient hurt before we were overtaken by the rest. I could not fly thus forever, nor seek cover like a slinking fox. Neither could I double back, for they were too close upon my heels for a turn from the main road, and I knew nothing of

the country thereabout. So when we had come to the hilltop, I drew rein, and faced about with my rapier drawn.

It was evidently the last thing that he expected I would do, and for an instant he rushed on, only to pull up suddenly when he saw me thus at bay. As I looked down the hill I could see him dimly but a short stone's throw away. I was facing the still rising moon as I sat, and must have made a fine target against the cloud-blown sky. I had expected that he would come to grips with me, but apparently this was far from his thoughts—or at least until reinforcements arrived. The first of his riders who came up approached no closer than the leader—likewise the second. As far as I could judge they said nothing, nor discussed their further steps, but simply gathered to await my next move. I began to fear that I had made a grave mistake in stopping at all. To be sure my horse was recuperating from the killing pace I had set, but so were theirs; and while a few moments before I had had but one, or at the most two, to deal with, now I could see four figures down the road. Could it be, I wondered, if the last of them had crept around me in some manner, and would spring out from some tree or shrub and essay a sudden thrust?

I decided to attempt an argument.

“Ho there! Footpads!” I cried. “Is there not

courage enough among the four of you to face one lonely rider? ”

The serving-man took it upon himself to make reply. Although before he spoke I could not have told one characteristic of his voice, at his first word I knew him perfectly.

“ Is that Captain Lambertine on the black horse? ” he cried; “ because if it is I have a message for his ears.”

I did not desire to admit or deny being the Captain until I knew better of where I stood, so I simply called back, “ What is the message? Speak, and be prompt! ”

“ It is not one I can shout about the countryside,” he replied. “ Give me your word that you will do me no harm, and I will come closer to you.”

“ Come then,” said I. “ But come unarmed, and alone.”

He at once allayed all suspicion by dismounting and clambering up the steep incline; one of his little company holding the bridle of his gray mare, from the saddle of which his sword rattled in its sheath against the reeking sides of the animal. When he had lessened the distance between us by more than half, the one-eyed fellow hesitated. Something about me, some slight idiosyncrasy of form or gesture, seemed to warn him that I was not the man whom he sought. Evidently this

lack of absolute recognition was the cause of their stopping where they had, and again it called the leader to a halt a dozen paces before me.

"Are you indeed Captain Jonathan Lamber-tine?" he asked for a second time.

"I am the man you seek," I answered, resolutely.

"I have this message," he said—and paused.

"What is it?" I asked impatiently.

"This!" he replied; and drawing a pistol from concealment about his person he fired at me pointblank!

He was but a few yards away, and that he missed was remarkable. As it was, a black plume from the Captain's hat fluttered away in the breeze. The instant the report sounded, by some concerted agreement the pack charged up the hill toward me. I could have first reached the villain with my sword, but my revenge for this dastardly attack would have been short lived, for I would have been surrounded ere I could escape. Instead, therefore, I grabbed forth a pistol from my belt, and taking careful aim as he ran toward his companions, I pressed down the trigger. The flash from above his head turned my mount suddenly about, and I took advantage of this to let him dash down the far side of the hill at top speed. I had the satisfaction before I turned, however, of seeing the big man, who was looking

back over his shoulder at me as he ran, stagger at my shot, and throw his hands up to his head as though my bullet had taken effect. The highway now wound down into a fertile valley and up another elevation perhaps a mile away. As I reached the crest of the opposite rise my pursuers were entering the valley below. The moon had crept behind a cloud again, and I could not be certain if the gray mare and her rider were in the van or not.

It was just on the top of this hill that, as I turned again to look back, my horse shied at an object invisible to me, and the next moment was down in the rough road, with me sprawling a dozen feet away—unhurt, but shaken to the marrow!

The moon shone dimly for a moment and in its pale reflection I saw the Blackbird scramble to her feet and limp to the roadside. How badly she was hurt I could not tell. The chase, now almost to the hilltop, would be upon me. There was a whitewashed gate to my right. I swung it open, dragged the horse through, and hurried along the drive thus discovered until I came to a small out-building which stood adjacent to a white stable. Some distance beyond was a large house, and I had decided to demand protection at its door, when the party following, having evidently sensed my turning there, came hastening in at the gate.

I was in the shadow of the outbuildings, and while I could not make the door of the house without discovery I still had a moment to conceal myself. Slapping the mare upon her withers, at which she straggled painfully toward the dwelling, I ran my hand quickly in the darkness along the boards of the frame building by which I stood in the hope of locating a door upon my side. One was quickly found, fortunately, fastened only by a hasp, and I stepped within and drew the door as close behind me as I could. There being no way to secure it from within I pressed to further concealment, and guiding myself by the walls reached the full length of the small enclosure in a few steps—and a stumble over a bench and some boxes. The place was obviously a wagon house, now empty except for some lumber and small storage, and a more unhappy spot in which to hide could scarcely be conceived. I had no light, and could only guess that there was no window—and probably but the door at which I had entered. Three sides were of unfinished boards; the fourth was the rough stone side of the large stable against which this frame building stood.

As I crouched against the furthest partition I could hear the approaching horsemen. They were coming slowly—feeling their way, evidently, as I was feeling mine—and it was with a heart of

stone that I remembered my one loaded pistol was still in the saddle holster. My sword had flown from my hand when I fell from the tumbling horse, and I stood practically defenseless. My pursuers seemed to stop before the very door of my refuge. For a second I thought this but imagination—a panic of fear at my position—and the next the door was pulled ajar and I caught the impression of several figures moving in the frame made by the entrance.

I was blessing my good fortune that all was in darkness, when someone without shouted for a lantern; and shortly I thought I saw a distant gleam, as though the request was being met. Was there no escape? No concealment? Frantically I felt about, and in so doing I struck the hinge of a small door which probably opened out from the rear of the shed. Anxious only to win away from the approaching light, without another thought I groped for the latch of this promised retreat, found and raised it, and stepped through—to find myself in a small closet evidently used for the hanging away of harness and carriage gear.

I had not been a minute too soon. The little door had scarcely shut upon me when the lantern arrived, and my pursuers stumbled into the shack. A thin line of light filtered under my door, but owing to the minute dimensions of my hiding-

place I was unable to use this aperture as a look-out. I could not even kneel, let alone crouch against the floor. The space was, in fact, so small that I might have been measured for it. I was compelled to stand as bolt upright as a chimney-sweep in a narrow flue, and the air, from my rapid and excited breathing, was fast becoming heavy and stifling.

I tried to concentrate upon just what was taking place a few feet before me. The voices of the men were not indistinct but their words were mostly unintelligible. An occasional oath or exclamation seemed all that properly tuned to my ears, and yet I could gather right well that the wounded man had been assisted to the bench over which I had stumbled, and I heard his voice rise now and then in a plaint as unskilled hands attempted to probe the seriousness of his injury. One of the others had evidently assumed command at the fall of their leader, and he was issuing instructions; not all of which met with the approval of the rest.

"You must remain," he seemed to be saying to one, who evidently desired to be elsewhere; "you must remain, and I will tell all to my lord at once." Immediately there would burst forth a mutinous harangue at each of his suggestions, which would die away in a moment when nothing better as to proposal was forthcoming from

the discontented. Shortly I heard the name of Lambertine spoken, and judged that some were to continue the search for me. This also met with opposition, which shortly died—and I was positive I noted the departure of the new leader to inform his master—de Bournonville probably—and the retreat also of those appointed to follow and capture me. There were left, as far as I could judge, the wounded servant, and his one companion with the lantern. These I must now quickly overcome.

The vitiated air was sapping my strength, and prompt action was necessary. All was quiet now but for the pacing back and forth of the impromptu nurse, and the groans of his charge. I decided that naught but boldness would avail me in my predicament, and as it appeared that the man left in attendance was pacing slowly the length of the shed, I concluded my best step was to wait until he arrived close to my closet, and by a quick spring forth so amaze or terrify him that he might be overpowered, or at least allow me to escape. With this thought in mind I deferred my foray until he seemed to linger almost directly before me, and then I reached to raise the latch of my door. To my dismay, although I ran my hand over all of the surrounding woodwork, there was no latch or catch upon my side of the portal.

I was caught like a rat in a trap!

For a moment a cold sweat broke out upon me and my head swam. Must I call out and implore my enemies to liberate me? And what if I could not make them hear? And—horror upon horror!—what if they refused to heed my request and left me walled in my tomb alive! It sounded like a caper that would fit well with the humor of the one-eyed hireling; and now he lay groaning on the bench outside my prison, suffering from a wound inflicted by myself! The outlook was gray. I do not know which fear lay the greater upon me: that they should discover me; or that they should go, and leave me as I was. In either case I saw no end but death.

As these thoughts flashed over me I was still eager to grasp of the movement in the shed, and before I could come to a decision on my next act, I heard the attendant flunky bid the injured man remain where he was, and that he was going to the house for a bit of drink. The wounded fellow remonstrated, and then implored the other to remain, but the former's thirst was evidently greater than his sense of duty, and I heard him slam the outer door on his exit.

The menial Cyclops, palpably hurt yet not disabled, cursed after the departing intimate heartily, and then rose, with much gasping of anguish, and came moving slowly about the walls of the

lean-to as though in careful investigation, or quest of something. So carefully and sluggishly did he stir that many minutes seemed to pass before he had come near to where I stood, and in that time a dawning apprehension took possession of me and shortly drove me from simple anxiety to a panic of terror and dismay. Some strange animal-instinct in this man had warned him that I, his assailant, was near at hand—and he was searching for me as a serpent crawls upon a frightened but fascinated prey. Likely he did not know of the existence of my refuge, else he would have come directly toward it. It seemed rather that he must find me out by minutely examining each inch of the wall.

I could but hear him, at first, stumbling through the semi-darkness—moaning in pain as he went, or cursing the fate which drove my bullet unswerving to its mark. Stealthily he made the longest side of the building and drew nearer to where I cringed in my fastness. I wondered how he was armed, and if he would attempt to spit me on his blade. If I could but gather back to spring upon him when the door was loosed, my chances would be tenfold amended, but I was hemmed about as though within my coffin. I heard him come against the partition wherein lay my hiding-place, and take a step or two toward me. Then, in a second, he seemed to go quite

mad, and screamed out like a frightened animal—calling upon his God in wailing utterances which made me shudder, while he beat upon the walls in frenzy. But almost as though appalled by his own anguish the man's voice fell to a plaintive weeping—and then silent in turn. Soon I heard him move again.

He was coming directly toward me!

I could hear his breath now as he stooped along the wall, and the chafing of his fingers as he felt his way over the partition. So keen were my ears that I detected the impact of his palm with the hinge simultaneously with the gasping intake of his breath. He had found the end which he sought—a moment more I knew his fingers touched the latch!

I steeled myself as best I might. The door flew wide so suddenly I could not leap as I had thought to do. The serving-man had thrown the shutter open to its furthest, and with his hand still upon the latch took a short step toward me—and stopped. Face to face we stood. The light of the lantern on the floor shone bright upon his heavy countenance; shone bright upon the clotted blood and dust, upon the sweat of dolor and dismay. Down past his cheek a slender stream of fresh gore dripped from beneath a bandage, wretchedly tied, which now hung in a futile fold away from his hurt. All this I saw—and then,

with a cry which in its horror echoed his own lament, I rushed from before him into the night without, leaving him trembling there beside the lantern.

A shaking giant he—one-eyed no more! My pistol-ball, guided by the retributive hand of fate, had seared his one good orb.

The man was blind!

CHAPTER XI

TELLING OF HOW I MET THE CAPTAIN'S BRIDE

WITH the sightless eyes of the serving-man ever before me, and the thud of his phantom horse on the winds of the night, I sped from the spot with a fleetness born of more than ordinary fear. Down the lane I dashed and through the whitewashed gate, its ghostly pales in the gloom barring my path for a moment, then sighing closed behind my flying heels as though to shut this painful memory forever from my mind. But swifter than the chilling breeze, outflying the besomed witches to their Sabbath, there hovered the vision of that ghastly pain-drawn face, so that as I neared the spot upon the highway at the hill's crest, where I had fired the fateful shot, I needs must dash myself aside from the main road, not being able to pass the place, and plunge over the fields toward where I detected the purling of a friendly brook.

Once by this stream, singing and gurgling in the moonlight past the stones, I paused to drink and bathe my fevered face, settling my borrowed finery more carefully about me, and stilling as best I could my ruffled nerves. Always the cry

was in my heart, although I did all that I could to reason it aside, "What a fiasco you have made of it all!"—"What a tangle you are in!" and I could have wept to think that after the Captain's trust in me I stood, disarmed, unhorsed, adrift, and the hour of my meeting with the Great Lady now swiftly winging by. Should I return and acknowledge my unfitness for the quest? No; never that! Better to gather what I could of pride and courage from the wreck I had already made, and start on my mission again, be its accomplishment ever so hopeless.

The clouds had blown away by now, and the moon shone steadily above, glinting in golden streaks upon the rippling water, and pointing a well-worn trail beside the runnel's edge. This trail I decided to follow, but whether up the stream or down I was not certain. Finally I determined that this was possibly the source of the creek wherein golden fish were netted by the Indians, and as the Great Lady's home was somewhere along its bank it were better that I went down-stream; therefore I broke from a tree a staff to serve me as a crude weapon, and set forth.

I had gone but a short distance when the water widened into a broad pool, then narrowed over rocks again, only to spread to a goodly width below, running on between heavily wooded banks among the stark trees through which my faint

path wound—now up, now down, but ever attending the little river in its wanderings. Where, I wondered, were the three sailors who were to aid and protect me on my journey, and where also was that sly fox, the peddler? I must have ridden far afield that they had missed my track. Had they known of my imprisonment, or would they learn of my escape? They might even be at the farm with the white gate, attempting my rescue. Had they found the blinded servant, I wondered, or was he still moaning in the outhouse, unable to find his way to his associates? This last was a picture I wished not to linger upon, and I gave all heed to the road before me.

If the water was all alight with the rays of the moon, it was but natural that the bank I treaded, so thickly timbered, was heavily shadowed in comparison; and in the first few minutes of my passage I anticipated that someone might spring upon me from behind some dark tree or lead forth an attack out of the murk at my elbow; but this dread was born of jangled nerves, and soon I stepped forward fearlessly, albeit my staff was gripped tightly in my hand.

A mile I went, and still another, although the going was treacherous at times, and I made little speed; and shortly I descried—across the water from me—a light which gleamed among the slender trunks of saplings, and seemed to shine from

out a window. I sought a ford, and splashing my way over above it crept along until I was below the eaves of a small stone building beside which the stream sang merrily.

Beside me was the lighted window, but first I lay low and listened, realizing that if I peered within my silhouette would be clearly seen by any watching thereby. Hearing nothing and seeing no one, I decided to risk a glimpse, so removing the Captain's headgear, I thrust my face against the pane.

The room I beheld was small and bare, with a table of rough wood in the centre and a fireplace opposite my window. A plain stool was beside the table, and seated upon this, with the grace which would have better become a throne, and her hat, gloves, and riding stick on the board beside her, was the Great Lady!

Her hat was laid aside, I say, and her tangled curls shone in the light of the blaze and taper as though they were spun from jet. Her eyes were wide as I watched her, and her lips curved sweetly as she spoke; but with whom she was holding this conversation I could not see for they sat well back against the wall wherein my casement lay. I had meant but to steal a look and turn quickly away, but when I saw who sat within I stood as though rooted before the window; and although the voices were inaudible I attempted to gauge

by her demeanor if she were apprehensive or distraught over the non-appearance of her lover.

Hers was not a countenance I could easily read, but it seemed to me as I watched that she was laboring under a strain which she was attempting to conceal. I was about to turn away, when she started with hand upraised, and her indication of the door suggested that there had been a knock for admittance. She evidently bade the visitor enter, rising to face the doorway as she did so, and there arrived immediately a tall, gray-clad figure—bearded, and with tonsured crown—who I guessed at once for the priest or monk of whom the Captain had spoken. This man, whose features were rather more forceful than spiritual, closed the door carefully behind him, and held a short, rapid conversation in which my lady and her companion were jointly included. Its nature was of course impossible to surmise, but at one thing which was said the Great Lady lifted and nervously tapped her riding-crop upon the table, and I noted how white her knuckles grew with the intensity of her grip, and how, when the monk closed the door behind him, she dropped the whip and pressed her two hands upon her breast as though to still a turbulent heart.

Back I stepped into the shadows. Nothing was to be gained by studying this picture, fair as it was painted by the glow of fire and candle.

What should be my next step? There seemed but one; to go boldly to the door, and beg of the priest to admit me to the lady's presence. Surely she would vouch for me, even though she recognized that I was not her lover; and when my story had been told perhaps horses could be secured to take us two to *The Silver Ship* where my mission might terminate in success after all my tribulations. "Dare as I would dare" the Captain had said, and upon this road alone would victory follow. I put upon my head in a rakish mode the broad-brimmed hat, tossed wide the worn but ostentatious cloak, and making much of the staff which I had cut, I swaggered to the door, and firmly beat upon the panel with my foot.

My rapping was shortly acknowledged by a smooth-faced menial who bade me enter, and left me standing in an empty hall, with the candle on the floor, while he went for his master. A door through which he had vanished showed me a narrow streak of light from within, and I could hear his voice mingling with that of several others as he told of my arrival. One voice, about which there was a faintly familiar ring, dominated the rest, it would seem; and I distinctly heard its owner bid the flunky bring me in at once. A murmur of dissent he was quick to drown with an attitude which brooked no opposition, and he

came to the door himself to see that I was ushered promptly to their presence.

“Come in! Come in, my good sir!” he cried, advancing to throw wide the portal. “It is likely the very man whom I have waited for this sixty minutes. Come in, for you are at your journey’s end, good sir!” And wide he threw the door, and low he bowed to me.

It was the self-styled Ambrose de Bournonville!

He was smiling, and the pistol he held in his hand was less menacing than his mirth. Behind him in the well-lit chamber there sat three of my late pursuers, their arms piled before them on the table. It would seem that I was out of the frying-pan and into the fire now, but I put the best face upon the matter that I might, and laid aside my staff, hat and cloak at his request, and trailed him into the room. Once within, de Bournonville turned upon his followers sharply.

“My trap, you see, my mud-splattered dullards, is far more efficacious than your witless riding of the countryside. Here sits our simple friend, and no blows struck; whilst that great booby must needs suffer his sight—although outside of a frowzy wench or two he has seen naught these many years—and all to no purpose save the laming of a horse and the quarry away free again. Now, get you out with the hounds, and leave me

with this zany for a private word. No slinking at the latch to listen, else I shall scent your stable flavor through the wood, and close your ears for ever and a day. Now"—to me, as the others filed out into the night,—“now, my bully-rook, we may talk freely together a while. You may tell me of why you ride about in the masquerade of a better man; and I will tell you of the coin in which you will be paid for the doing of it. First: What is your name, and what of your estate?”

“I am a man of gentle birth,” I replied. “My name is Myles, Basil Myles; and I consent to reply to your questions because I have nothing of which to be ashamed. I believe that you are Ambrose de Bournonville. Am I correct in this assumption?”

“You are,” he said.

“And these men about you? They are your henchmen, I suppose?”

“You are correct once more,” he smiled.

“Then you may give me a prompt explanation of their banditry and lawlessness in riding me down in so menacing a manner!”

“They followed my wishes in so doing rather than my orders,” he answered easily. “You are evidently made up to play the part of him I would catch. Well, my big dull servant has not lied to me, it seems, when he swore he laid a ball from his pistol in Lambertine some few nights since.

You are venturing in his stead, it would seem—a dangerous occupation, but one for which he pays you well, no doubt. Be certain that you will not depart from me unrewarded.”

“Is that a threat?”

“Threat? I like not the word,” he replied. “May we not put the immediate future aside for a moment, and speak of what has been? Let me ask you, for instance, why you attempted this rash ride to-night at all? Was it to see the lady, and tell her of the Captain’s injury?”

“I do not hesitate to admit the truth of that,” I said.

He nodded thoughtfully, with his deep-set eyes upon my face. “And you wore this cloak and hat to easier meet, and catch the eye of my cousin? That is a vanity I readily see through, my bird of borrowed plumage; but why do you make this desperate venture your own ——?”

“I think the word desperate not advisedly used,” I said, for he had paused. “The wish to carry a message of explanation for a friend to his mistress could scarcely be so called. In attempting to find and speak with your relative I am committing neither crime nor sin.”

“I see it as no virtue,” he replied. “Your coming has much upset me. Had this pirate kept his appointment—I would have killed him very thoroughly and with a right good will. Had he

remained in hiding—I would have turned his timidity to my own account. But your arrival, which would prove his constancy to the lady, as well as incite her sympathy for his disabled state, is unpropitious to my desires. You are his relative, I suppose?”

“I am not,” I said.

“Well—that lacks importance, whether you lie or not,” he continued evenly. “The question is, shall you see the lady?”

“The question seems to be,” said I, “can you stop such a meeting?”

“Pardon me,” he replied coldly, “but that is not a question at all. I have several times, during this short interview, thought of discharging this pistol at your head as the most facile method of closing the incident of your arrival; but the lady is here in the building, as perhaps you know, and I do not desire to intrude the report of a firearm upon her present sensitive frame of mind.”

“The crime of murder lacks in popularity hereabouts,” I said.

“Oh, true! True! And I must consider my personal feelings in the matter also, having an almost feminine distaste for brawling and bloodshed. But your masquerading as a man with a price on his head would readily justify my killing you in mistake for him—as your own good sense of fair play will admit.”

"Your distaste for blood did not deter you from drawing your sword upon me not so long since, when I came forth of The Silver Ship Inn unarmed as now."

"It was you, then! I might have thought as much when you came like a lamb to the slaughter. The Captain would have looked before he leaped. If I finally decide to scatter your brains with this slug the world will hardly suffer from the loss."

"I will admit that when it comes to treachery you make me look a sorry bungler."

De Bournonville laughed softly. "You still can spit through a venomous tooth, I see. Yet what can you expect but hatred from me? You, and your master Lambertine, have done your best to ruin me and my hopes—and met with some success, I admit."

"It would seem that if your hope lies with the lady she has indeed come to meet her lover here in spite of you."

"It is true; and yet I like you none the more for harping on that string. I did my best, and would have had her to wife this two months gone had not we met with this sea-robbing cut-throat. His swagger won her (God knows why!), and she has sighed for him since, whilst I have held him to cover. Some nights ago they met, renewed their pledges, swore to win past all my opposition. This hour seems to be then the last of my ascend-

ency—and well my foes will recall its passing moments—those of them who live to remember aught.”

“You love this woman, your cousin, do you not? Why cause her suffering?”

“Has she spared me? I loved her, yes. Perhaps at times my eyes were more upon her wealth than on her beauty. And yet, that is a love of a sort as great as any other. I have lived in many places, Master Myles, and womanly comeliness seems indigenous to all climates. I have won much of it, and tossed much of it aside. But gold—such amounts as these, my cousins, have—fades with more grace than dimples and bright eyes. You think me sordid doubtless, and yet it is but that I speak more frankly to you than would some. For herself, I love the maid well enough.”

“At least you must love her enough to spare her pain, even though your pride will suffer in this union on which her heart is set?”

“Not so fast! Not so fast, good sir!” he responded. “I love no one enough to forego the revenge I have laid aside for this same pirate. And now”—he finished moodily,—“you come, to interrupt the feast.”

“I would get me gone,” I said. “But first I would speak with the lady.”

He looked at me slowly, with almost an expression of curiosity upon his face. “Do you ex-

pect that I will step aside, like, let us say, this good Christian brother Kelpius here, and bid you Godspeed in your efforts to thwart me? No, Master Myles. You have come to me as my enemy, with the cloak of my enemy upon your back, and the hope of my enemy in your heart. Through your own insagacity you stand before me now unarmed—defenseless. You bid me hold my temper—me! Red with the blood of a faithful servant, you tell me, ‘Hold your hand!’ If I were as you, and *you* sat here in my place, pistol in hand, would you open the door and beg me to walk free—to hatch a better plot? No, no! You sing of forgiveness only when your sword is broken!”

“You do not set it fairly forth!” I cried. “The Captain had the right to win the love of this maid as well as you. Because she turned her heart to the better man must we all be shot when our backs are turned, or stabbed when we answer a call from the darkness? You have set out for the Captain’s blood, and the blood of those who call him friend, because in the eyes of the woman here you did not measure to his standard. Must we all suffer for your shortcomings?”

“You are blunt in the face of danger; but you overlook what, in the eyes of a man of better breeding, would be evident above all. This Lambertine took advantage of his position as ship’s

master to covet one far above him in station. I have my faults, God knows; but at least I was born a de Bournonville. That one fact covers much. I am a gentleman—he is a pirate. My cousin is gently born. With me she might not add much from the standpoint of personality, but to accept him would be to lower the prestige of her name. If you saw a fox creeping away with a falcon you might scarcely hope to save the fledgling's plumage after his teeth had sunk in the flesh, but at least you would shoot Reynard—that he would filch no more. Your master has, to me, a vulpine mien, and you are of his pack. Why should I hesitate to shoot you down as well?"

"Because of the law," I said.

"Your disguise, you must remember, will be excuse enough to save me from the law."

"Your conscience then."

"Thank heaven, that was an organ I was born lacking."

"That you may turn the lady still further against you by so doing," I hazarded. "Remember, if *this* sister weds the Captain—one still remains."

He nodded thoughtfully. "There is reason in that. Death sharpens your wits. What if Helene would mistake your body for that of Lambertine? Be seated again a moment, good Master Myles. A plan is forming gradually in

my mind. I think I may still put you to good use alive. Suppose you sit you still a moment."

He leaned across the wide table from me, his pistol resting on the board; and though his thoughts had gone a-glimmering for the while they were not far enough away to allow his grip to ease upon the trigger, or the muzzle to waver from my breast. Had it been so I would have hurled myself upon him, for I saw my chance was slim to get away unscathed. Finally he spoke.

"I think I see how I may kill the Captain's chance to wed my cousin, if nothing more. That she will turn to me when he shall prove himself unworthy is not likely. Still, I will chance it—with your aid. Listen carefully, my good fellow, and follow my instructions. First, go you to the door and see if any listen. Do not attempt to escape. It would be impossible, and perhaps painful."

Under the leveled barrel of his dag I did as I was bid—and found to my amazement, crouching in the hallway with his ear to the door, the slight form of Peter the Peddler, his admonitory finger on his lips. My one desire was to cry out, and make a dash for liberty, but this, with the exit likely guarded, would have meant death to the peddler and to me. So when my gaoler asked again I closed the door with a negative gesture, and I was then ordered to resume the Captain's

hat and cloak, and stand in a dark corner of the apartment while he scrutinized the effect, snuffing out several of the candles that we might be in the half light alone. Then he beckoned me closer, seemingly satisfied with my resemblance to the man on whose mission I had come.

"I will explain to you my little plan," said he. "It is rash, I admit; but it may win by its very boldness. If it does not, at least you will not be in a position to receive blame for any fault you may make in the doing. You will be wherein God's mercy may direct. Now hark to this, and obey. As you know, you are in the home of Father Kelpius, a German monk, who was to bind in wedlock Lambertine and my cousin Helene. He believes from my story, that the match is not a wise one, and is closeted with the maid, that he may argue her to a sane conclusion. It is possible that you may not believe this that I tell you, but it is nevertheless true."

"So far I have every reason to believe you, for I saw both the monk and the lady through the window before I knocked for admittance."

"Very good. Did you know that Helene's sister, Josephine, has also arrived?"

"No. But it was no doubt she who made the third person in the room with my lady."

"There you are wrong, for neither sister knows that the other is yet here, although they arranged

to meet at the wedding doubtless. The matter lies thus, Master Myles: it was with my cousin Helene that I first was smitten, but the pirate arriving, I was satisfied to turn my affections toward her younger sister—if so it could be arranged. Evidently it could not, for these two are as one in their perversity; so while one stayed to flaunt this buccaneer in my face, the other kept so well out of my clutches that my suit languished for the very absence of her. Now, they had built to meet here, wed, and away; but the youngest bird walking into my net, as did the older,—and yourself—the good priest locked them apart, at my request, in different rooms, and he is now doing what he can to bring the one to her senses.”

“Who then was the third person I saw in the room?”

“It was in all likelihood Cora, the personal maid of Helene.”

“And what is my rôle in this mummary?”

“My arrangements seem to be both simple and effective if you but do your part. In this uncertain light Helene, who will be called hither, will mistake you for the Captain. Before both the priest and her sister I will ask her again to choose between us, offering to stand by and allow her marriage with the supposed pirate if she will conscientiously admit before all that he is her paramount choice. I doubt not—such seems her

infatuation—that you will be indicated. I will then command the monk to proceed with the ceremony of marriage between you.”

“But this I must refuse to allow!”

“Just so,” he laughed softly. “You will be compelled to refuse; and she will be thus scorned before these witnesses. It may be that her pride will turn her then to me, but I have little hope of that immediately. At all events it means the end of your master’s wooing. I cannot see wherein the plan can fail.”

“But it is preposterous,” I cried. “This thing that you suggest is too impossible. How do you know that she will think I am the Captain? It may be that she already knows of his hurt?”

“No,” he said. “She knows nothing of that yet, or she would not have come so far to meet him here. I thought it possible that her sister might have learned he was wounded, which is one reason I have kept them apart.”

“Then hear the truth—for there is one silly weakness in your scheme that you have overlooked! I will not refuse her in the words you might suggest. Rather will I cry to all that I am but an envoy of Lambertine’s. When she knows of his injury—done to him by you and your servant!—she will likely fly to him, and with my aid. You cannot murder her or me while the others are about, even if your blighted love would

lead you to such ends. Come! Play the man, and let me speak fairly to the lady, as I asked."

"Not quite so fast, my bully-rook, not quite so fast. You will be made to answer as I wish—on that I had decided first. I will illustrate just exactly how if you will kindly open the door again—always with due regard to my pistol, naturally—and let me call my gillie."

The firearm was raised as he spoke, and there was nothing to do but comply. Still beside the door-jamb crouched the peddler, but a slender shadow in the darkness. As I remained by the open door de Bournonville lifted to his lips a silver whistle which hung by a ribbon about his neck, and at the call I heard footsteps approaching from the rear of the building. Swinging wide the cloak I wore, I had time but to cover with it the figure motionless in the obscurity, when two of the servants stood beside me. It was well for the peddler—and well for me—that they kept their eyes respectfully upon their lord while he issued his instructions.

"Joseph, you get you back to the scullery," he said. "Giles, you shoot well with the pistol, do you not?"

"This man will say I do. I laid a ball close by his head at a hundred paces this night, and both riding at our fastest."

"I am promising a better target in a moment,

though the quarry will be the same. Get you outside of that window upon the grass, with your dag. When you are there I will raise the sash that you may hear what is said. As for me, I can give you no signal, for I must be mixed in no murder whilst others are by—so hark well to each word which is said within, or you may later envy him who has but lost his sight. To no one pay attention but this man before you. If he should say aught but—now let me see what I will allow him to say.” He thought a moment, then nodded his head as though satisfied. “He may use just three words. If he says more than these, shoot me him through the heart. He will stand directly before the opening of the window, where I am standing now. You cannot miss his words, nor miss the target he will make. In case he should attempt to spring upon me, or otherwise attack anyone present, you will also kill him at once. I think you had best shoot him down if he moves two steps in any direction. Is this perfectly clear to you?”

“Yes,” said Giles.

“And the three words?” I asked anxiously.

“You may say to her request that you marry her, ‘I will not.’ Nothing else may you say, but you may repeat that as often as it is necessary. A word or action other than what I have allowed—and Giles will serve you as I ask. In case the

shooting of him becomes necessary, my man, you can make the excuse that you mistook him for Captain Lambertine, a pirate who had formerly threatened your life. If you care not to say this you may hang. That is all. Take your place."

I felt myself grow numb before the frigid serenity of his passion. I might have cried the mercy of the sullen sea, the winter's pitiless blast, and gotten more response; and yet I knew that he would gloat upon a show of weakness. I clenched my hand upon a dagger's haft beneath my cloak, thrust in my belt by Peter while I shielded him, and strove to match the calmness of de Bournonville.

"One moment," said I. "What if the lady should ask me if I thus would cast her aside? What reply should I make, if any? I could not say, 'I will not,' in such an event."

"True," he replied. "Just this one alteration, Giles. This fellow here may also say, 'I will,' under certain circumstances."

"If Giles is to be the judge of circumstances I had best refuse at once and take the bullet now," I said. "He knows nothing of your desires in the matter—or of mine."

"That is fairly put," said de Bournonville. "Use not your head in this affair, Giles, other than this: he may say either 'I will' or 'I will not.' Outside of that you use your pistol. Look

well to the priming, and when you fire aim to kill, for I wish no tale of all this, backed by the sympathy for a dying man. Remember!"

I gasped as the servant lifted the latch into the hall again, but the way was empty, it seemed. Had the peddler heard? I did not dare to think otherwise; for if so he might, in some manner, aid me; or were it so that I was to die, at least he could give evidence against my murderers.

Facing still the weapon of the master, he and I stood motionless until Giles had taken his place without; then, under the cold eyes of de Bournonville, I stepped to my place—but with a strange plan forming in my mind. The scene was set, and at my side I could hear the grating of Giles' gun-barrel on the window-sill.

"Understand, Master Myles," were my captor's final words, "you are less than the dust to me, and I would kill you out of hand, simply as a friend to this dastard Captain, if it were not better that I use you for my purpose so. Vengeance I will have for this slight that was put upon me. There is no hardship in what I ask of you. Simply refuse to wed the maid, and keep a still tongue in your head until all blows over. Later——"

"Later," said I, "you will probably kill me to be assured of that still tongue."

He nodded a laughing appreciation of the possibility. "That will depend entirely on you—

and circumstances. We will let the immediate future point the way to further events. I am calling the priest now. See! I raise the sash but enough to let the pistol intrude. Can you see and hear clearly, Giles? Good! Remember your three words, both, and this mummary will soon be over."

He touched a bell upon the table before him, and thrusting his pistol in his belt strode to a spot before the fire, his figure showing bright in the blaze while mine was in the shadow. The smooth-faced servant replied to the call, and was sent away for Father Kelpius. Ere the monk rapped upon the further door which led to the interior of the house, de Bournonville said nothing, but many thoughts flashed back and forth in my mind. I had almost come to a determination impossible to even contemplate a short hour before, when the priest was bidden to enter.

He was a well-knit forceful figure as he stood quietly across the apartment from me, but I feared his piety and single-mindedness made him but a tool of a man such as he now faced.

"Have you spoken to my cousin, Father?"

"I have spoken with her, my son, and I find the situation scarcely as I had expected. You gave me to believe that this maid was in two minds between you and the other. It would seem that she has little love for you, and looks to him

for protection from your importunity, as well as to wed him here to-night. How came you to mislead me?"

"If I did so, it was but the coy artfulness of the lady which spelled the matter so to me."

"Just now when she spoke there was nothing but directness in her attitude."

"Alas! It may be so," said de Bournonville. "Yet it would be but a faint-hearted lover who would retire from the list ere he had proved his suit dead by more than just one word."

"I have known both of these sisters long," said Father Kelpius, after a slight pause. "While not of my faith we have pursued some goodly works together. They hold a standing in these parts, and in my best regard as well, which makes me hesitate to give advice—yet makes me loath to go against a wish of theirs. The eldest child awaits the arrival of a certain one. Is this the man?"

"He will acknowledge himself the same," said de Bournonville.

"I will," said I, and shivered in suspense that my voice had correctly carried through the window.

"I will tell her of your arrival," said the monk, and withdrew.

"See how all things fall fair to him who dares the Gods!" remarked my companion in a soft

voice. "What the priest says fits well with what we have to play."

I could say nothing; but hearing the rustle of her coming in the hall without, I straightened up as much like the Captain as I might—and whispered a prayer. She entered with a firm and regal carriage, pausing as soon as the door had closed behind the priest, her maid Cora, and herself. My lady did not see me at once, or at least looked not in my direction. It was not until her kinsman pointed me out in the shadows that she recognized my presence, placing her hand upon her heart as I had seen her do when I looked through the window a short while before.

"Mistress, my cousin," said de Bournonville, with a gallantry not unbecoming his pliant figure; "as you expected—and as I hoped—your suitor has kept the tryst. Here now he stands. The thought was, I now apprehend, that you two should wed beneath the hand of this same Father Kelpius, and fly to-night from the wrath you dreamt in your madness I, your cousin, would show. It is true—nor would I attempt to deny or excuse it—that I have ever thought Lamber-tine no fit mate for one who comes of noble blood such as yours; but when the happiness of a relative is at stake (and such a relative!) I know enough of this same love to cast the dice as best I may, and if the game falls so I cannot win, to step

aside—nor leave the bitterness of loss on any but myself. You, Lambertine, while I have hunted you these days past, must do me the justice to admit that if—in the cause of my King, and my country's laws—I have been fierce, I have been fair.”

“I will,” said I again, and marvelled at the fellow's wit, that he could bring it so my reply would fall true to my restricted sentence.

“I have no shame in saying before all,” he continued to his cousin, “that I have placed my name, my heart, my very all at your disposal. So far you have seen fit to turn from my suggestions. That is as it is. I wish to wed no loveless bride; nor—mark me well, Helene—I do not wish to see you wed where love has ceased to be, and thoughts of gold are uppermost, my sweetest cousin. Upon the seas, blown hither and thither by the ocean winds, soft words of love are easily passed—and easier forgotten. A night or two ago, this fellow tells me, he chanced upon your home, and found you in a receptive mood. The moon shone high, and the winds of night set from coast, and blew from off the crest of curling waves those words of love long scattered to the waters wherein dead passions lie adrift. To-night the moon is waxing brighter still, but he has found his wisdom and his honor ere the madness of a marriage-knot is tied. To wed without love the Captain feels is

sin. He would not do you this injustice, cousin mine."

"And in saying this you speak for him?" asked the monk quickly, while my lady stood with her two trembling hands clasped before her, and never seemed to lift her eyes from her kinsman's face.

"He will allow me to, I am certain," was the prompt rejoinder. I was about to repeat my formula when a sound reached me from the partly opened window at my side. It was not so much of a gasp as a sigh; and the muzzle of the pistol wavered, and for a moment disappeared. I think it was I alone of those in the room who heard, but I cast aside the warning, if such it was. My determination was strengthened.

The Great Lady was speaking; speaking in a soft, pleading voice which thrilled me, so unexpected and so sweet it was. "Long nights ago," she said, addressing me, "and here again within a few short hours, you swore that you would always hold me dear. Is this not so?"

"I will!" said I. De Bournonville stirred suddenly by the fireplace.

"My heart I gave to you; in pride that it should fall into your keeping; in humility that I had but myself to offer for your love. This man who claims my kinship I loathe, with all the hatred bred for vile and slinking perfidy. To you, my Captain, all my heart is given, as it is drawn

to what is pure and bright. To-night I would you wed. Will now you cast me off? From your dear lips alone will I believe it! ”

“ I will not! ” said I, resolutely.

“ A priest is here,” she said again. “ He is not of our faith, but even so, his word will bind us twain as firm as any ceremony. Will you refuse to wed me thus? ”

“ Wait! ” cried de Bournonville, suspicious of my reply perhaps; but ——

“ Silence! ” said the monk, with that authority born alone of the church; and he fell to biting his nails in silence.

“ Speak! ” continued Father Kelpius. “ Will you throw aside this love, and refuse to wed? ”

“ I will not! ”

Her cousin stepped forward, but the priest was beforehand.

“ How now? ” said he. “ If you are French in truth, you are born of the Church of Rome, and as such are subject to me in matters of your faith and soul.¹ There is some trickery here, and know that the sacred office of my Church I let no man deride to his own ends. Between you two I fear that hatred rests, and blood will yet be spilled for what’s done here to-night.”

¹ The priest must in no way be confused with Kelpius, the Dunkard, who also settled upon the banks of this stream.

"If blood is shed it will not be the fault of any hatred I bear," said de Bournonville. "It is true that we have our differences, Lambertine and I; but hatred! There's a word I will deny I feel toward any man."

"'Tis well," said the monk shortly. "And if I agree to perform this ceremony will you attach your seal as being a witness thereto?"

"Nay! That I cannot!"

"Why, and I bid you?"

"Because—because I have sworn an oath upon the cross above my mother's grave that never shall I sign my name again until a certain evil knave is strung by the neck to his gibbet."

"You seek revenge," said the priest, "and yet you do not hate. That needs an explanation, think you not, my son?"

"It is not of the Captain here that I speak," the other answered hastily; "and I call it neither hatred nor revenge. It is but justice that I seek on one who, without cause or reason, thwarted me at every turn of a venture close to my heart—creeping like the hell-hound that he is, with neither hope of reward or service, at the heels of his base-born master."

"I know the man, and I know the master," said my lady from the depth of the shadows in which she seemed to have shrunk while Father Kelpius and her relative argued in the firelight.

"I know them both full well. Never had man a finer, better master; and never has one been served as true as he. If I had all the gold that all the pirates ever dreamt upon, I'd pack it, every piece, in Peddling Peter's pack, and bid him Godspeed to his journey's end."

"So?" said the monk. "Well, I know naught of Peter save what is known to all. It's like enough he deserves the gold no more than he deserves the gibbet; and is in that respect like the rest of us. Mistress, can the maid here sign her name?"

"Cora? She can."

"And one of your men can certainly do likewise?" he asked, turning to de Bournonville.

"Not a cursed one," came the prompt reply. "I think this ceremony had best be laid over."

"Nay; my lady's sister will do well for another witness."

"Josephine here?" cried the Great Lady.

"She has been at the monastery for some time, but your kinsman thought best, for his own purpose evidently, that you two should be kept apart. Do you still desire that this marriage be consummated, my child?"

"If you think well of it, I do."

"And you will love and hold dear this maid, or if you do her grievance will pay an hundredfold?"

"I will," I said.

"And therefore," said Father Kelpius, "I will wed you two without sanction and without bans, because I believe that to do so now is best. And if wrong is done in so doing the fault will lie at my door, or at those who have misled me. Go you at once to my study where your sister waits, and say that I desire her presence. Do not linger, for the night draws on. Stay! Have you a veil or covering for the head? It is taught by St. Paul that the head of a woman must be veiled in kneeling before God."

"I have a long silk screen which I wear in riding, against the sun and dust."

"It will suffice. Cora, place it upon your mistress, and see that she does not delay. Wait! There must be a ring! If no one else can produce one the wedding band of my mother lies with some treasures in my sleeping apartment. I will fetch it for use if none other is found. Gentlemen, but a moment!"

The door had scarcely latched, leaving us two alone, when the furious de Bournonville turned upon me, with a curse; his eyes like flames beneath his gathering brows.

"Well done! Well done!" He whispered in his icy irony; and then, as though unable to control his fury, he burst into a hoarse scream of rage, the more frenzied because it was modulated to the room alone. "You cur! You spume of

filth! You hound! What do you think to gain by this, I ask? What if you can for a moment carry this service through? Do you think that such as she will give her flesh where her word has been got by trickery? And if she were mad enough for even this, how long do you think you have to live for this witless thing you've done?"

His weapon's muzzle bore upon my face. For a moment I thought that he would dare the incriminating evidence of his smoking pistol, and lay me dead at his feet. I held my tongue, but answered the menace in his look with a sneering smile which cut him deeper than any reply I could have made. If he would but come within my reach I'd chance the man at the window for one stroke with the knife beneath my cloak; but he was wary by instinct, although he did not dream of his peril, and kept afar.

"Go!" he cried suddenly. "Go before they return! I will make explanation which will in no way reflect on you or on your master. Go now! And I give you your life freely—until we meet again. Stay—and you die!"

I hesitated. A marriage such as this could not be valid, I thought. If I go I will be dead ere I reach the bank of the creek, and by his orders, for murder was as plain upon his face as in his levelled pistol. If I stay it may be that my

lady's sister has heard of the Captain's wounding, and the ceremony be thus put off. To leave the situation as it is will be to play directly into the enemy's hands. To remain will be to court no greater danger, and I felt that by doing so I somehow had this man upon the hip. To explain all if she and I *did* wed would be a dire ordeal, but it would be worse for de Bournonville than for me. And, best of all, Peter the Peddler, whom I knew now must hate de Bournonville even more deeply than could I, had been crouching without the door and would bear me a right good witness. If this ceremony was performed I must also face the *consequence*, but I put that from me now. One day must be met at a time.

The antagonist was looking close upon me, and from the shadow where I stood he read my determination in my face. As he took a step backward I was surprised—for he evidently expected I would embrace this opportunity to escape—I threw up my head to face him fully. And so apt am I to speak that which is in my mind, that without a thought as to the fatal result I answered firmly: "Here I remain to see this matter to a conclusion!"

No sooner had the words left my lips than I was struck rigid with dread. I think he also was so amazed at my staying that he quite forgot the penalty born of my speech. Then, with a quick

realization of what should immediately follow, he turned toward the window, crying:

“Shoot! Fire, you hound! Shoot him down!”

He turned to the window, I say,—started back with a cry: “The fiend is in it!”—and at that instant, with a spring so sudden that it surprised myself, and caught him entirely unprepared, I leaped upon him!

Two thoughts were uppermost in my mind: to disarm him ere he could discharge his weapon; and to keep him directly between me and the fateful casement. In my first effort my unlooked-for onslaught was successful inasmuch as I secured the wrist of his pistol-hand in a grip which prevented a direct discharge upon me; but to maintain this hold, and at the same time use his muscular body for protection seemed too much for even my evidently superior strength.

He bit and snarled, and twisted sinuously, striking at me with his free hand, while I put forth to drag him flat against the wall in which the window opened; smothering his blows as best I could. The heavy cloak about me gave some protection, but hampered my drawing immediately the knife at my belt; though, as I flung our two bodies at a spot out of view of his servant at the casement unless he should further raise the sash and thrust his head into the room, de Bournonville seemed to sense the blade under my hand

and struggled still more desperately to prevent my drawing it forth.

Knowing me his master now, he gasped out a cry, which had its echo from the casement; and then, as I heard the sash being laboriously lifted from the outside, that the assassin might carefully sight his victim, de Bournonville and I were as suddenly hurled apart, and I staggered back to face the priest's imperious gaze—in his stalwart grasp the pistol of my antagonist, wrenched free of still clutching fingers.

“As I feared,” he said, grimly, looking first upon one and then the other of us. Had my moment come to speak! One hasty glance at the now wide window showed me a crouching form with firearm raised. It was useless! I had fought the good fight; now must I carry through what fate held for me as best I may. A feeling of dullness and apathy overcame me. Rigid I stood, nor could I turn my mind to any but one thought. Upon a night but shortly past there had blown down a flurry of snow as the sun was setting, and Joan being in the far orchard I had gone for her with a cloak. We had faced the flying flakes together in the dusk with scarce a word until she had climbed the stile by the pasture; and when I had lifted her down, ere her feet touched the earth, I had pressed my lips to her cold wet cheek—and it was of this I thought

—naught else. I think, however, that for a moment I closed my eyes.

In the slight pause my lady, her sister, and the maid entered at the far door. It was as in a dream that I watched the priest open the pan of the pistol he held, and blow it clear of powder. He placed it on the mantel in silence, and drew forth from a pocket of his gown his book of office. I think he motioned me forward, but I did not move; so he led the visibly trembling girl to where I stood, the silken wrap thrown over her silken hair in the nature of a nun's veiling, and—with dominant eyes never leaving the face of the bride's kinsman although he held before him his book as though he read—he joined us two in holy wedlock by the light of the flickering fire!

I do not recall much of the service, and I think that it was hurried and condensed. At one time I stood, and he bade me say, "I will." It was well that I had little else to repeat. The ring I placed upon her finger was too large by far, and the finger on which it was placed was so cold that it matched my very own. We knelt, and Father Kelpius blessed us, and put up a prayer in the tongue of his church. I rose mechanically at the words: "*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, Amen,*" and in another moment my lady was being hurried away by her sister and Cora to be made ready for our honeymoon journey.

Close by my side, with his hand upon my arm, stood the monk. By the fireplace stood de Bournonville with a face upon him which would have blasted us both had his eyes the power to kill. To him Father Kelpius spoke promptly and firmly.

“Ambrose de Bournonville, and you also, Basil Myles—if that be your proper name who are also known as Lambertine—this marriage will be recorded by me with witnesses whom I will detain here until after the departure of the new bride and her lord. Let me warn you both, solemnly and with great caution—seek not to set aside this marriage, or have it dissolved by either Church or State. It must, and will, stand henceforth as valid before God and man. You, Basil, think well upon this, and get you on the road to happiness and understanding with your new-made wife as speedily as you can. Nothing can part you now. Nothing! Ambrose de Bournonville, return whence you came! Your suit for this maid is forever done. Her sister is also betrothed, I learn. Press them no further, nor cause more trouble and annoy, or suffer the displeasure of your Church, your laws, your fellow men, and your conscience. Remain, however, until the departure of this pair, for there are subjects I would speak further upon before you depart from this land—forever.”

He kept close beside me to the door which communicated with the entrance hall. Peter the Peddler had gone, although for the last few minutes I had quite forgotten he had ever hidden beneath my cloak.

"Remain here until I secure a horse from the stable for you," said Father Kelpius. "Also I will bring your wife to you when she is ready to depart."

And with this he laid down the candle upon the floor and left me standing alone in the little hallway, dazed and disconsolate. Ere he closed the door into the room wherein I had just been wed, however, I got a last glimpse over his shoulder of the grim face of de Bournonville. He was at the fireplace again, busy in priming his pistol anew.

And it was thus that I secured the Captain's bride for him!

CHAPTER XII

TELLING OF THE PACK THAT THE PEDDLER CARRIED

I LINGERED in the hall of the monastery that stood beside the cool flowing rivulet, and I waited for the good Father Kelpius to bring me my horse—and my bride. He seemed a great while in returning, although which of the two detained him I did not know. I remained so long alone, or so it seemed to me in my nervous condition, that eventually I got to wondering if he had forgotten me entirely, and had gone to his promised interview with de Bournonville, whom I thought I could hear pacing up and down the room where I had left him, evidently in the final stages of a consuming rage.

Also I began to wonder if this was the safest place for me to remain, directly on the outside of a door which he might open any moment, and find me alone and apparently unarmed. Would he not attempt violent measures in retaliation for my theft of his bride? I drew my knife, that which Peddling Peter had thrust in my belt, and stepped close beside the opening so that if he did suddenly emerge I might be upon him before he

had time to put me at a disadvantage. With my ear to the door I listened.

I thought I heard him mutter to himself. Was there one with him—Father Kelpius, for instance, or had someone entered from the far door for conference? I hesitated to raise the latch, both on account of my own safety (which seemed of paramount importance to me now that I had escaped the death-bullet of Giles,) and also in the thought that, were the monk in converse there, it might suggest on my part a lack of trust in him which I was far from feeling. While questioning my next best move, I was suddenly thrilled by a cry from de Bournonville, followed by a short sentence I was unable to comprehend; and immediately a pistol barked out on the other side of the door against which I stood, followed by a silence only interrupted with the tinkling of broken glass. I stood uncertain—hesitant; and within the time it takes to draw one deep breath another shot crashed as the first, and I heard the impact of a body as it struck the floor!

There was no outcry, no groan, no lamentation. No sudden rush to escape further fusillade, or swift-receding footsteps of a murderer fleeing. No movement, no sound. Nothing!

It was as though these sharp reports had been but in my imagination, except that as I pressed close against the door to catch the slightest sound,

the unmistakable odor of burning powder came to my nostrils—the incense of a bloody sacrifice. Who lay there upon the floor so still, so motionless, yet cried upon me with a voice which deadened every earthly sound to pull aside the door and look upon them? The brutal master himself, seared with a suicidal bullet? The firm but kindly priest? One of the servants with a traitorous tendency?

Suddenly a thought filled my brain with such a flood of terror that all other possibilities were washed aside. Could it be that Helene de Bourbonville had entered here to seek me, and had fallen under his hand? With that thought alone in mind I dragged wide the door, and bent my gaze at the spot where I had heard the body fall. The candles burned brightly in the sconce and some that had been out when I had wed there a while ago had evidently been lighted since. Also the fire burning briskly between the dogs added its illumination. No body lay upon the spot my sense of direction indicated it had fallen. The room contained no furniture large enough to hide a fallen form. The floor was bare of corpse or apparition. The room was empty—save for one slight figure by the open casement.

So still he stood, one hand upon the window's wooden sill, the other thrust within the bosom of his shirt, that I was as startled, I think, as though

he were a dead man, risen up. He stood so still so long, his eyes upon my face and a queer twisted smile about his mouth, that I was forced to wet my lips ere I could even speak the name I knew so well.

"Peter!" I said, finally.

"Yes, Master Basil." His voice was as gentle as always. We paused.

"Peter," I said eventually, "what was the meaning of what I heard?"

"What heard you?" he asked.

"Shots!"

"So?" he replied, and mused.

"You heard them, did you not?" I asked.

"I? Surely. I thought it might be you. I came to see."

"And look!" I pointed out. "The window glass above your head is broken by a bullet!"

"God love us! So it is!"

"Where is de Bournonville?"

"I know not! How should I?"

"Was he gone when you came in?"

"Sure, Master Basil."

"And the man at the window?"

"What man?"

"His servant! The man who took his pistol to shoot me down. Certainly you heard the arrangements which were made? The fellow—was his name not Giles?"

"Oh!" said Peter. "It's Giles you mean, friend Giles?"

"Certainly! Was he not here also?"

"He was also gone."

"They must have left together," I said.

"No," the peddler answered thoughtfully. "Giles went some time before his master. You see, when I crept to the window and thrust through *my* pistol at de Bournonville, why Giles had already gone then."

"But when did you do such a thing as that?"

"Why, just as Master Priest brought the ladies in and married you to one of them. I thought you saw me! Don't you remember de Bournonville called out, 'Shoot! Shoot him down'? But when he saw it was *me* standing there—he held his noise. You were married right good. Master Basil. I'm a witness, I am."

"If I had known! If I had only known that it was you at the window, I would be a free man this minute. Oh! Why did I not have the courage to face the bullet that I expected would be loosed upon me? Well, it is done now, and the best must be made of it—if there is any best at all."

"She is a sweet maid, think I," said the peddler. "Many would be proud to master such. I have heard, too, that money is free with her, and that — Hist! someone comes!"

“Wait! ’Tis but the Father. You might see him for a moment ——”

“Not now,” said the peddler; “for I have work to do. I give you good-night ——” And with a slight touch of his hand on the sill he vaulted through the raised window, and was lost in the darkness.

I stepped into the hall where the monk had left me, and closing the door of the apartment which had served as my wedding bower, I awaited Father Kelpius. He was soon at my side, and led me to the entrance where three nags were now drawn up; one riderless for me, one bearing the lady’s maid, and the last ridden by the erstwhile Helene de Bournonville. Without a salutation to either, I mounted, and the monk had a word for us all ere we departed. Standing upon the door-sill, candle in hand, he bade us collectively a kindly farewell.

“Have no hurry regarding the horse, my son; and when he is returned do you come with him, that we may have a word or two of gossip. You, my dear daughter, forget not of what we spoke, and when the time is ripe believe that I will send you word. Take good care of your mistress, lass, and none have a thought for Josephine, for she will be on her way to her home in safety with my servant. Good-night! Courage—and God bless you all!”

We jostled away among the trees for a few hundred feet—now one in the lead, now another; until, without any word being spoken, we three drew rein at the beginning of the ford over which I had waded some time since. There my lady spoke.

“And where do you take us—Captain?” she asked.

“Where—what ——?” I stammered.

“Are you taking us up the stream—or down, Captain?” I thought as best I could.

“Do you know the road to The Silver Ship?” I asked.

“For sure do I,” she answered.

“Then if you will take the trail, that is where we had best be heading;” and I pricked my horse into the cold water; but she was quick to call me back ere I had made a length in the stream.

“If you would go the shortest way,” she said, “we must turn to the east. Do not cross. There is a path which winds up the hillside just beyond.”

I turned back and followed her and her maid as well as I could by the waning moon, and soon we were at the entrance of an Indian run cut among the close-grown trees which fringed the valley. I thought it best that we should go no further from the monastery without explanation, lest it might be her desire to return; so bidding Cora draw out

of earshot I grasped my lady's bridle, and we halted.

"Well—my Captain?" she asked, and waited.

"I am not Lambertine!" I blurted out. "I am not whom you think me, nor whom you would love—but it would seem that I am your husband nevertheless!"

"What talk is this?" she answered. "Not my Captain Lambertine? Heaven defend me, but a madness has come upon the man!"

"Nay! I am in my senses, and know well that a great wrong has been done to you. But be assured that I am no more your Captain than—than—than you are yet unwed."

She was silent. I think I gave praise that I was unable to see the suffering in her face. We said nothing for some moments. Finally she put to me the natural question:

"If you are not he that I love, who may you be?"

"My name is Myles—Basil Myles; and my father is of no little importance in the affairs of the City; but that be of small interest to you under the circumstances, except that I would have you know you deal with a gentleman; one who appreciates your present situation, regrets it the more that he was instrumental to an extent in placing you thus, and would and will devote his life to extract you from this circumstance."

“But how ——?”

“In a word, ’tis thus: the Captain was felled with a wound—your cousin’s one-eyed man near did for him upon the night you met—say three nights since. I came here to let you know of this, for I am friendly with your lover, nor hold any man as dear as I hold him. He thought it would be wise to dress like him, that friends who knew not of his injury, and who had sworn to aid him come to you, would help me in the selfsame way. De Bournonville nipped me in a trap—just as he caught you and your sister. I, as your lover, was to cast you off, and that I might play my part without trickery he placed a certain villain at the window to shoot me if I did not do his bidding. I feared that if you heard me, as the Captain, deny the love he truly bears for you, that in the shock and pique of being scorned you might be rash enough to turn to *him*; and that, I think, was uppermost in my mind, so that I spoke what Lambertine would have spoken had he been in my place—and shortly Father Kelpius made us man and wife.”

“Tut!” And after a little pause she made a clicking with her tongue, in vexation. “It would seem that you, good Master Myles, are too thorough a deputy to send on delicate missions. Well, matter might be worse—and might be better. There’s one fear that you never need have had:

that I would ever turn and wed my kinsman. Now let us on to The Silver Ship as fast as we may, for I would be with my poor injured dear, and nurse him back to health again. And also, here's a wish I hold not close, this same cousin of mine might do some hunting of his own along this river's course; so it is well we make all haste over this quiet path. How say you? When the sun rises, and finds us safe at the sign of The Silver Ship, we may then make plans for having this foolish ceremony nullified. Until then, let us not bother over the trifling prayers of a well-meaning but unqualified old man."

"Bravely said," I replied. "Call the maid, and let us on at once."

Up the rough trail the three mounts stumbled, my lady leading the way. Thank heaven, thought I to myself as I jogged behind her, she has sense enough, and philosophy enough, and perhaps inexperience enough, to accept this awkward outcome of my envoyship lightly. Maids with less poise may have wept, or fallen a-fainting, to find themselves the bride of a stranger, but she made the best of it, nor put the blame on me—although I could scarcely see wherein I might be censured except for not knowing that Peter had taken the place of Giles at the window. What had happened to Giles, I wondered. Had the peddler frightened him—or worse? And de Bournonville!

Where had he gone following the discharge of the pistols? I asked both my companions had they heard these shots, but it seemed that they, with the monk, were at the stable securing their mounts at the time, and could throw no light on the matter. I had ridden close to my lady's stirrup to receive her information, when she suddenly checked her horse and grasped me by the arm, which halted me as well, while the last of our party lumbered into both of us in the dark, but through good training and reason held her noise.

"Look!" said my lady, in a voice which scarcely sounded above the swirl of the running water below. I presume she also pointed, but it was too dark to follow that. The path we were following pursued the course of the stream to a general extent, but instead of keeping beside it in the narrow valley, it ran along—first up the hill-side well above the current, winding in the trees, now low where the water widened to a river's width. We were at the moment upon the lower level, and the moon had sunk so far by now that the vale was but a murk on either hand except for the ripples on the creek which flashed a faint reflection of a starlit sky. Above, the trees stood out in bare-branched grandeur, souging with the night-wind's harassing, and tossing appealing arms heavenward in futile plea. Upon the ridge above us they were silhouetted most clearly, and

the emergence of our path there making a break among the trunks, I saw, black against the firmament, a figure for a moment stand, then mingle with the shadows as though he was coming toward us upon the trail.

The wind and the water together made no great clamor. If we spoke he would likely hear us, but it was most improbable that we had been seen. Our horses were resting easily, and if they did not snort on winding the one approaching—or champ at their delay—he were likely to meet with a surprise as well as we. The monk had supplied me with a sword. This I drew, and pushing silently to the front—sat waiting.

The night seemed gradually to hush. All nature was on tiptoe by our side. The time it would take the man to cover the distance passed—and doubled; yet nothing occurred. I was about to speak, to inquire if what I had seen concurred with my lady's vision, when I detected a sound in the brush before me, as though the traveller had left the beaten track and was making his way in the stubble toward the stream. Had he discovered our presence, and was he cutting around us, or had he strayed from the trail on which we stood? His movements were slow, and evidently laborious. At moments I could distinctly catch his heavy breathing. A thought struck me that he might be injured and creeping to the water-

side; I listened with that idea uppermost in mind, but his breathing, if heavy, was devoid of the catch which usually accompanies pain; and while his passage was beset by a rank thicket he was making a steady progress.

The sound of his advance died toward the water—and ceased. We were alone again, we three, and yet I hesitated to give the forward word till I had talked over the situation with my companions. Scarcely had I seen the man, if such it was, against the sky. Dismounting softly I drew beside the lady, and with a reassuring touch on her bridle was about to speak, when from the creek below there arose the sound of a mighty splash, and as we stared we could see, between the tree-trunks, pale circles racing over the surface of the stream from the spot where entry to the river had been made. The sound echoed against the opposite hills for a minute, awakening kindred tumult in the forest's depth, and died away to that awesome stillness which ever follows a rash disturbance of the midnight's calm. Our chill as we rested there was communicated to our horses evidently, for I could feel my lady's bayard tremble, and toss his long head to be away again.

"If it were a man I saw, he has leaped into the river," said I in a hushed voice.

"Nay," she answered, "he has thrown his bundle in."

"What bundle?"

"Did you not see? He was a man with a great bundle upon his back. I think he has cast it into the stream."

"Was it a very large bundle?"

"Almost larger than himself. He was bent double beneath it, like a peddler would carry a heavy pack. I am gazing at the spot where I first saw him, so that if he comes forth again I can make sure ——"

"Look!" I gasped, for a movement from the edge of the shadows was evident. And then I had suddenly raised my voice in a cry which roused the frosted forest's sleeping reverberation:

"Ho! Burlington, ho!" and again: "Ho! Burlington, ho!"

The peddler paused, less in fright or surprise it would seem than in speculation, and lifted his hand to acknowledge the cry although he did not make an effort to come in our direction. For this, however, we did not wait. Relieved that it was a friend we had seen, I sprang on my horse and was up beside him in a bound, it seemed; nor did I lead the lady by a length, or her maid who kept close for protection.

"Well, well, Peter, but you gave us a fright," I said. "You wander about like a winter owl in the wood. 'Tis my lady here, if you cannot see, and her waiting-maid."

"Bless us all, and so it is," said Peter, acknowledging the presence of the lady with a flourish of his cap. "You will be, I take it, on the way to The Silver Ship now, Master Basil?"

"I am heading there with the help of the lady, she knowing the road better than I. Perhaps you go that way yourself, and can guide us through the darkness?"

"Nay. I must to other business. Before I start, however, I will say a word to the lady—with your leave."

"My leave you have. Is it to be private?"

"No, no! It's but to say that *I* think she rides by a proper man and a proper husband this night (although I *did* think as how there was another wench who'd be in her shoes!), and to wish her well of her wedding."

"Nay, Peter," answered my lady, blushing in the darkness belike; "this was but a mock marriage, you must know. I have naught to say against the man who rides beside me—nothing! And I am too short wed to learn of other wenches from him yet—but when the truth is known of the affair this marriage will be set aside right promptly."

"But this cannot be!" cried Peter. "I saw you kneel, and pass the ring between you."

"Possibly. But Father Kelpius cannot marry me to any but Captain Lambertine."

"He did though," argued the peddler; "and I saw it with these two eyes. He's a good marrier, is the Father. Many's the hands and hearts he's joined. There was the Crunchers—her that was from upper Jersey; and the Goths. She was a Tyson, toward Cooper's. And Le Duc! Master Basil, you'll remember Le Duc?"

"I cannot say that I recall ——"

"Surely! Surely! He comes each year when the ice breaks in the river. It was from him your mother (and well I remember her, Master Basil!) got the pelt what you wore on your collar when you went to learn with old Master Mutch, at the fort. Don't you mind how Le Duc carried you home on his back the day you fell in the pond at King Lane!"

"Wait!" said I. "Was he a great bearded fellow, from Canada?"

"The very same; and a fine man, as many can tell. 'Twas Father Kelpius who married him. I was there. And they went back as far as the falls by Trentown in my shallop the next month. They were married good by him. Jean would tell you that in a minute. Every time he comes with the pelts I cry to him, 'How is Annette?' and he says, '*Grande!*'. A fine man, Jean. And well married. Nine—ten—eleven years come April, it was; and last spring there was eight children, and if this year comes a boy he promised me it would

be Peter. Oh, I can tell you, Father Kelpius is a good marrier."

"Peter," said I, "if you are not going our way we are but detaining you—and you, us. It is our intention to get to the inn as fast as the darkness will allow, for it might be that the lady's kinsman would make a last attempt to do us hurt upon the road. You will agree that we had best be going, will you not?"

"Surely," said Peter. "Best be away, although fear not from de Bournonville. He is far from us now, I think."

"Have you reason to believe that he has departed for good?"

"Ah, Master Basil, 'tis but a hope; but if he was to be lying about this path to the inn I would have known, for I have met three friends of mine—sailors all—and no one has gone this way the night through."

"That is good news at least. Here is the knife you loaned me when I was in need, friend; and come to The Silver Ship that we may talk again of this night's doing."

"I'll come. But like enough you'll not be noticing old Peter for a while, and the lady's bright eyes are on you."

"Already have we told you that the marriage will be set aside, Peter."

"I'll wager it will not," said Peter boldly.

"It will, nevertheless. You know so much, I wonder have you been wed yourself."

"Nay! Marriage is not for the like of me," said the peddler depreciatingly.

"And why?" asked my lady.

"Ah, it is no good that comes of a wife."

"Why, what a way to speak to a bride!" cried she.

"I speak not of rich folk," he explained. "For them it is well. But for such as I, who love to wend about ——"

"And travel o' night in the woods!" I interpolated.

"—and be a-roving always, it is not best."

"As you never were married you cannot know," said my lady, who would have the last word; but Peter came back with a chuckling answer, although I did not altogether understand his allusion.

"You take your marriage, and give me a night like to-night," he said. "I couldn't have had such a night if a wife had been tagging along after me. I've waited for this night as no bridegroom ever waited for his bride—and I have drunk my fill—and he is drinking of his!"

"I live but to wed the man I love," said my lady, thoughtfully.

"What a way to speak to a bridegroom!" laughed the peddler mockingly; and then:

"Maybe, but name me one joy that ever came to the poor through marriage."

"Why—why you, yourself, were a joy of this wedded life."

"Not I!" said Peter, and his tone was almost of pride. "I'm a fledgling that springs of the hedge in the dusk—that whirrs from the dust in the night. I come of no ring, and no prayers—not I! I'm a child of the will which is weakened by work, when youth in its chains sinks down to dream where the wild flowers wave by the road; and my muscles and guts are the iron and brass that pull at the sweeps of the river boats. But not of the rivers hereabout, Master Basil. I'm a Frenchman born, you know."

"But you have been here a long time, Peter?"

"Not so long as you may think. A little over twenty years, perhaps."

"That is longer than I can clearly remember," I replied. "What brought you so far from your home?"

"Fear—hatred—sorrow! I came from the dirt; yet from such spring the fairest flowers. There was one at home, pale like the lily—and as pure. We were to wed, 'twas known the district 'round, and the priest who would make us one spoke of her beauty in the Seigneur's hearing. He had a son, had the old Baron de Château-Gui, a young but vicious spawn of hell's own breeding.

You've heard of the Right of the Seigneur, Master Basil? 'Tis a law in France as old as God Himself, that the peasant's bride shall lend herself to the will of milord on her wedding eve, if so he would. The old Baron de Château-Gui was not unthoughtful of the happiness of his people. We knew of these laws but by the tales of olden times, and paid our tithes content. Not so with this young Milord. The night before our wedding my love was borne by force to the château—even the priest stood back, nor raised a hand. You see, it was the law. I was upon the river. None could reach me. She hid a knife upon her, and when the young marquis drew aside the curtains of his couch, the sheets, a while so white, were crimsoned over all with her heart's blood."

There came a pause. His voice seemed softer when he spoke again.

"He was wild with rage, was the young Milord, when he cursed her lying there; and he swore that I should also die—because she had done this for love of me. He was frightened, too, that his father might learn; and alone he lifted her body in his arms and in the night—a night as cold and dark as this—he cast her still form into the river near. So, as I sailed toward my home upon the dawn of my nuptial day—she came to meet me on the ebbing tide."

He paused again, and still we did not speak.

His voice was ominous when he resumed, the tones were round and hollow like the booming of a distant bell.

“ In the sweet wood where she was born I laid her safe to rest. And then I returned—for him. A cry had been raised by the priest, and the good people of the district turned against the young marquis. He fled. I followed. He had wealth, position, influence. I had nothing but my pain. Many times I lost the trail; and many times I picked it up again. Years ago it seemed to lead here to Pennsylvania. I came. Again I had been misled. The good father who wed you to-night got from me something of my story. He bade me seek revenge no more. Here I remained. But I had sworn an oath upon her white body that he, her murderer, should float upon the current as had she. I took to the river and my shallop as I had done at home. Your father, Master Basil, was kind and generous to me, a stranger, and much I went in his interest to the different river towns. Do you mind now, how as a little lad you sailed with me to the same Silver Ship where you are bound to-night? ”

“ I do indeed, Peter, my friend; but tell me, is there never an end to this sad tale? ”

“ Nay,” said he thoughtfully, “ it can but end with me—when my end comes.”

“ Good master peddler,” said my bride, “ if the

road be as safe as you think, let me place your heavy pack on my horse, which carries me lightly, and we can turn to where you might care to go, and ease you of your burden a while."

"My ——" the peddler hesitated.

"Your pack," she said, and as he did not reply promptly; "the heavy pack you carry to-night."

"Pack! Burden! I carry nothing, my lady!"

"But I saw it upon your shoulders when you entered the woods, good fellow. 'Twas as big as though you carried Master Myles here in your sack. Come! Let us ease your journey, if it be but a step."

"I bear no pack," he repeated; and then in the dim light I thought he raised his two empty hands toward heaven in a wide, wild gesture. "See! Henceforth my heavy load is cast aside. My burden slipped from off my weary shoulders but within the hour. Bear you no thought of me in grief to-night. No bridal couch will rest as sweet as mine 'though 'tis but some frozen rushes by the river's side. For many years I've drunk a bitter cup. Drunk deep—drunk long—yet ever hoped this night might lull my pain. To-night I know the glory of an oath fulfilled. Ride you away, and leave me to my freedom. Your road is clear. The Captain's friends, who missed you early because you were misdirected at the road-mender's lodge, are to see you safely home. They

do not know it, but their work is done. No de Bournonville lies in wait for you to-night. I've passed my cup of woe to him. He'll drink his fill for many nights to come! "

CHAPTER XIII

TELLING OF HOW THE CAPTAIN RECEIVED THE BRIDE I BROUGHT

It was well into the small hours of the morning when we three drew up before the familiar green door of the inn. A hastily awakened servant led away our horses, and we stumbled wearily into the ordinary where the firelight formed the sole means of illumination, and sat down to a meager supper—or perhaps the hour was more suitable to a breakfast—of cold meat, brown bread, and ale.

The family had long since retired, but Joan hurried down at once when told of our arrival, and to her I made known the erstwhile Great Lady (whose greatness had somehow so wilted in the tribulations of the night that she welcomed my arms when I lifted her down at the journey's end), and they went to the former's apartment together. Being left alone with Cora, who seemed intent on deepening an already too ruddy complexion with an inordinate consumption of beef and ale, I paced the space before the fire with my mind upon the Captain, and how I would break to him the events of my pilgrimage. Had he been

in health it would have been more dangerous, perhaps, but at least to face him up and armed at the telling would have been more to my liking, and the manlier part. As it was he might think I had taken advantage of his injury to play this sorry trick upon him. I do not wonder that I paced the flag floor.

When I had about made up my mind that to go to him at once with the story, regardless of the hour, was best, Peggie arrived with a message from him that he was less hale than he had been, and if all was well the doctor thought it wise to put off the interview until the morning. It would seem that Joan had sent the barmaid to him with the word that the Great Lady had safely arrived, thus putting his mind at ease. I bade her assure him that I would wait upon his morning's summons, and went to my room, and retired.

I retired—but not to sleep. From the moment when I had mouthed those fatal words before the priest I was like to a man who so fears death that he will not allow the word to be mentioned in his hearing, nor let his mind dwell upon the inevitable. Resolutely I had put behind me personal preference when I had undertaken this mad journey in the Captain's stead, and with all the firmness and will at my command I had choked back the realization of what all this night's work meant to me and my hopes. Now, with the

snuffing of the candle, came this wave of admission upon me.

Joan!

Verily, my hope for her was as dead as last year's blossoms. Not that this hasty and unsanctified marriage could not, in some way, be annulled—for I felt very confident *then* that it would not stand in law—but that no woman of her high spirit would forgive me such an act, nor believe it done other than at my will and desire. Had I been able to break the news of it to her in my own way, it might have been better. Not that I had any plan or fancy how it might be done without this same result, but simply that it seemed everything had gone against me. Of course Helene had told her of our marriage by now. It was naturally the very first subject of which she would speak. I wondered what Joan would say in reply. Would she toss her head, and feign that I was naught to her? Would she later toss upon her bed as I was tossing upon mine, wooing in vain assuaging sleep; or walk the floor of her chamber as I had been striding mine? Would she wring her hands and rail at her misfortune, condemning all who could be even remotely associated with the catastrophe—de Bournonville, naturally; Uncle Dickon, who had first voiced disapproval of our union; Captain Rumm; Father Kelpius; even Helene herself! In

my own misery I fear I was selfish enough to hope that I did not suffer alone.

When I thought upon the coming interview with the Captain, time seemed to fly. When my mind dwelt with the many rapturous hours I had spent with Joan—the pledges we had made, and the visional shimmering future we had planned—it seemed that the day was holding back to make my misery greater; and near was I then to anticipating the dawn and rushing to her side to learn my fate at once.

Physically I was fatigued to an exceptional degree. I had ridden far, and hard; had come a bad cropper, through which I was fortunate to escape with unbroken bones. I had faced danger, and perhaps death; had known the horrors of that dark closet in the barn, the taunts of de Bournonville, and worst of all, this hideous marriage mockery. Every muscle, every nerve, every drop of blood in my body almost, cried out for quiet and repose; yet dawn found me wide-eyed at the window. So broke my day of days.

It was scarcely more than light when Peg called me to my first trial, my interview with the Captain. Tapping at his door I found him propped into a sitting posture, and his face so pale and wan that my own fears were momentarily forgotten in my anxiety as to his welfare. He greeted me affectionately, holding my hand in

languid fingers hot with fever, and bade me sit close beside his pillow and recite my adventures from the very beginning of my journey.

On the opposite side of his bed sat Uncle Dickon. By the window, with some knitting in her never idle fingers, was Aunt Tulip. Otherwise we were alone. Neither Joan nor Helene had so far put in an appearance. I offered up a prayer that we would not be interrupted until I had made an end, and began.

I told him of the beginning of my ride, and of my stopping at the road-mender's cottage to inquire my way. When I told him the direction I was given, the Captain shook his head.

"You should have taken the west river road," he interpolated. "My friends were waiting there to see you safely forward."

"I am certain now that I was wilfully misdirected," I responded, and continued the tale of being followed by de Bournonville's servants. Aunt Tulip seemed hardly to heed my story, but Lambertine was deeply interested, and old Uncle Dickon hung upon every word. It was the first time since Joan had brought the damning letter that I had seen him so forgetful of his chimerical apprehensions, and it was almost the Uncle Dickon of old who nodded and grimaced across the couch at me.

I told of my hiding in the closet; of my escape

—at which the landlord threw up his hands in amazement; of seeing the Great Lady in the monastery; and of my walking into de Bournonville's trap. Both showed plainly their appreciation of my narrative; but the telling was not so easy now.

Then came my talk with my bride's relative, and his proposal as to the marriage—at which the Captain's brow grew dark. His threat of death upon me; and the words of Father Kelpius. It seemed that Uncle Dickon knew the monk right well, and even Lambertine spoke of his godliness. Thereupon I swallowed hard—and continued.

It was evident that neither of my auditors had the faintest suspicion as to what was ahead, but I did not keep them long in suspense. I told them in a dozen short words that the Captain's lady love was now my wife, and then I waited for the storm to break.

It was slower in coming than I had anticipated, doubtless because I had overlooked in my mental rehearsal of this scene that my rival was a dangerously wounded man. Heretofore I had but pictured the Captain of old. It was really my uncle who seemed to grasp the situation first, and he cried out suddenly, and threw his hand to his brow.

“Have you married this girl, Basil?” he cried.

"If Father Kelpius says the truth, we are tightly wed."

A strange look of relief came over his round face, a tear seemed to spring to his eye; and dropping his visage in his cupped hands he exclaimed so fervently, "Thank God!" that I was shocked at his reception of the tidings.

Lambertine had closed his eyes, and his face was paler, if possible, than when I had entered the room. Around his firm oft-smiling lips grim lines gathered. The nervous hand upon the coverlet twitched and clenched, and the long form straightened, as though he would rise and pronounce some dire anathema upon me. And yet he did not speak.

Uncle Dickon, sensing something unusual in the silence even through his own amazement, lifted his bowed head and also gazed at Rumm. The latter's eyes were closed, and he lay as still as death for another protracted minute, whilst the landlord and I looked first at him and then in consternation at each other across his still form. Finally the pale lips parted.

"Continue!" he said; and relapsed into his state of seeming impassivity.

I hesitated, and then calling forth my courage completed my adventure in a few words.

"I brought her safely here with her maid, Cora. On the return journey we fell in with Peter the

Peddler, whose words led me to believe that de Bournonville was, later in the night, slain by a former enemy. Of this I had but his indirect assurance. That is all."

"That is enough," responded the Captain. "I lie now here an ailing man, but shortly I will be well again, and then this matter will discover adjustment between us as it properly should. Until then—leave me."

I rose—I could do no less, it seemed, nor offer explanation or excuse other than the bald story bore,—and made me for the door. The Captain never changed his posture, and neither my uncle nor aunt made move to follow me. Once I found myself in the entry, however, my entire mental attitude altered. I had come to them with the expectation of receiving denunciation and wrathful verbosity. I had been met with a bare half dozen words, to which I was evidently not expected to reply. I had come to confess my desperate plight most fully, and with no intent to evade the consequences, but insensibly there had formed in my mind pleas and arguments of vindication, and these I was given no opportunity to set forth. In short, I had come prepared to fight, and I was defeated instantaneously by the cold non-disputative fashion in which I was heard. And this but inflamed my belligerent intentions.

I stood there in the hallway, just outside the Captain's door, and clenched my hands and swore to myself softly. I could have given right there a good many weeks of my life if he might have stepped forth strong and well again to face me over the situation without delay. I could detect no voices from the room I had just left, and I wondered if they were talking of me in whispers, and if so, what they said. I bent then with my ear to the door, and still silence reigned. Suddenly the thought struck home with a pang that I was eavesdropping, and I turned quickly away toward my own room again, when the door I had left quietly opened, and Uncle Dickon emerged. He did not see me, I think, for the hall was dark after the cheerful room, and he turned away and into his own apartment a little further up the entry. I followed so closely upon his heels that I was able to catch the door before it swung to and latched. Stepping within I slammed it shut, and grimly faced his look of surprise.

"Why, Basil?" he said, rather in inquiry.

Suddenly my rage boiled up within me to such a pitch that I could not articulate.

"What is it you want of me, my boy?" He must have noticed that my mood was not a common one. I, somehow, could think of nothing but how he had spoken slightly of the girl whom cursed fate had lost to me.

"You—you—you liar!" I spluttered in his astonished face. "You—you—old liar!"

"*What!*" he gasped in amazement.

"Liar!" I hissed. "*Liar!!*" The word did not in the least express my feelings toward him, but it gave me an unmeasurable sense of relief to rid my mind of that pent-up scurrility my temper had engendered. "Liar!"

"Liar! Who? *Me!*"

"Who else!" I responded bitterly. And then I remembered how Rumm had told Joan and me that the stories the landlord had nightly told were but a garbled repetition of age-old Florentine legends. "You have lied and lied, for years and years," I reiterated. "Liar! Liar! Liar!"

I had been through much, but I think my greatest shock was to realize that the man was down upon his knees before me, my hand clutched close by both of his, and pressed against his trembling tear-moist lips.

"Basil," he wailed. "Basil, say that you know I lied! Tell me again that you know old Dickon lied!"

Instantly my anger vanished in astonishment. I was struck all but speechless by the piteous face before me. The flaccid cheeks, the quivering lips, the age-dulled weeping eyes. The look of hope and understanding shining through distress. Poor tragic buffo—poor dole-racked clown! Rest here

your gross paunched body on the bed, and while I hold your hand, pour out your story to my sympathetic hearing.

"You know that I lied, Basil? Tell me that you knew I lied!"

"Yes, yes, Uncle Dickon. I have known for some time that the stories you told in the tap to our nightly gathering were not true."

"How did you learn?"

"It was the Captain who told me that they were tales written into a book long since by an Italian story-teller. He had heard them all before, and more still."

"Is it so?" he said, curiously.

"And we both wondered how you learned them, being unable to read—much."

"Listen!" he said, holding close my hand. "When I was a boy I lived here at The Silver Ship. Travellers were few then, and it may be that more was made of each guest. There came to stop here then a man, a foreigner, who was known among us as 'the Frenchman.' His name, if I remember rightly, was de Phillippo."

"All men who are not Briton born are known as 'Frenchmen' hereabout. The name suggests that, without doubt, he came from Italy."

"It may be so," agreed my uncle; "or, perhaps, Italy is but another name for where the Frenchmen live. However, this man came, and

remained with us for many months. At first we were suspicious of him, for he was very dark and wicked-looking. But one night, when the liquor had been passed about more freely than was usual, he entertained us with a strange romance. He spoke with an accent, but still his tale was clear; and such was the life and stress he put upon the telling that all in the inn gathered about to listen, and applaud. Perhaps this embarrassed him, for he was sensitive of his lack of English words, although I do believe he spoke as well as you or me—and so he told no more. But in the lazy afternoons, when we would walk together, he and I, to rest beneath the shaded river bank, he told these tales to me.”

The old man paused, and sighed, as though the memory of these days was dear. Perhaps again he saw himself a boy, lying at length upon the mossy slope, chin cupped in hand, and elbows on the sod, watching the fairy forms these fables conjured forth until they melted in the river's haze. So long he lay I pressed the hand which had gone limp in mine, at which he stirred, and turned to me again.

“My life was always colorless and dull. You think, perhaps, after you've spent your days within the city, that this small inn is quiet and obscure. Picture the life here fifty years ago. We were an outpost in the wilderness. I was a

quiet youth; dull-witted, fat, the butt of many pranks and jokes. Always I had an eye for loveliness, but the girls about—what few there were—passed with a laugh, or saw me not at all. Uncouth perhaps—but still I had my visions; a legacy mayhap from him whose narratives had planted here a secret garden—for this de Phillippo had long since gone upon his way, yet left his stories indelibly within my keeping. What hope I had of romance and of passion put forth no bud, but being sown on fruitless soil—withered. There came a time when a marriage was arranged between your Aunt Tulip and me. I was to receive *The Silver Ship* when I wed, so was I a marriageable prize. There was no love between us then. I do not doubt she wept her heart away that poor fat Dickon should be paired with her—but she was young, and so she did her parent's bidding. Each day it seemed we grew in the other's regard. Each day it seemed she grew more kind—more fair. Until this note from Jean was brought to me, I thought myself the happiest of men."

When he ceased for a moment tears were on his pudgy cheeks. I nodded sympathetically.

"So the letter and the maid were a surprise to you?" I asked.

"Surprise! Hark to me, Basil, my boy. In time *The Silver Ship* came down to me. The

business grew. More guests now stopped in a week's time than my boyhood saw in a month or more. All things went well. I prospered. There is in all men, I think, a secret egotism. Does not the Bible tell us that man at his best is altogether vanity? I am not the first who held dear the desire to stand forth of his fellows, regardless on what this eminence might be founded. Always it seemed to me that other men had had some strange adventures—something of interest to relate—while I sat back mum-chance, and no one ever listened to poor Dickon. I used to weep o' nights to think on this; the sum of my whole life seemed just—inconsequence. One night, I was alone at the inn, your aunt having gone away upon a visit, some strangers came; and after they had had their sup they sat about the fire. A great storm raged without—none came but they—and soon I made so bold to join them in their circle. As usual each had his favorite tale to tell: what *he* had done, what *he* had seen, what *he* would shortly do. And none being there who might give me the lie, when my chance came I wove myself, for their entertainment and my own, into a story that de Phillippo had told me years before. Never will I forget my feelings when I saw their growing interest. For this I'd lived. My moment had arrived! I spoke and acted as upon a stage. Warmer I grew, and even more

inspired. Midnight was gone, and still I held their ears, making them laugh or sigh to a wag of my lying tongue. Oh! 'Twas a heavenly moment for downtrodden me. Here then I sat at my own hearthstone, a man among them all——Nay! Truth to tell, *the* man! And more good punch was drunk that night by just the few than ever had been served at The Silver Ship before. I did not sleep that night. I watched the dawn climb up the sky, and shed its light upon an altered man. Back to oblivion now I would not sink—that much I formed my mind to. They stayed another day, these strangers, and on the second night they bade me hold forth again. Some of my erstwhile patrons swelled my audience. At first they were surprised to hear me speak so free, but soon what wonderment they felt was lost in the interest of my false adventure. Soon spread the news. Each night came some to listen. Trade grew. *I* grew. Shortly, rather than just the owner of the inn, I was the foremost at The Silver Ship. The servants scuttled at my word; guests bowed, and said, 'Mine Host!'; friends grew in number and in warmth. I was a personality! At night when I had gone to bed I lay awake to think of other tales, or to build further upon those already told. Thus it became the hobby of my days: to lie, and lie, and lie,—nor saw the wrong."

He had half risen as he talked, but now he sunk back, and seemed exhausted with his effort. I patted him reassuringly upon the arm as he lay quiet, and thought to ease his mind with a word spoken in kindness.

"It was a natural enough thing to do, Uncle Dickon," said I. "I do not see that great harm, or even small, could come of such play-acting. They were white lies, and injured none."

"White lies!" he cried, starting up. "White lies, which injure none? Alas! It was so I thought at first. I did not see that I dragged a fine name in the dirt—a name it should have been my pride to keep unsmirched. I did not realize that I was holding up to shame and derision the one soul, except yourself, who meant more in my life than all others combined. It was supposed that my wife should know nothing of these episodes, but of course I know now that she heard all, and what each ruttish falsehood must have meant to her I shudder to think, even though she must have recognized them to be far from truth. Your aunt is a gentlewoman of the most fastidious breeding. Each ribald laugh I raised, each exclamation from my hearers, must have been as a knife in her. And yet I did not think of this until later, when Jean's letter came, and gave me time and occasion to think."

“Perhaps the dear good soul knows less of these ramblings than you suspect. At least let us hope so. Now let me see if I thoroughly understand you. There was no truth in any of these stories? None whatever?”

“None! There has never been another woman in my life, and there never will!”

“But this letter that Joan brought you—from this woman Jean? What of that?”

He sat straight up in his bed, and put a nervous hand on each of my shoulders.

“You told me that I lied,” he said. “You were right, it was so, and I freely admit it to you. Now I am about to speak to you the truth. But, oh! I have that fear which every liar suffers: that you will not believe the truth when I tell it to you. That you will laugh, and say, ‘It is not so.’”

“I will believe you, Uncle Dickon,” said I. “Speak freely, and I will know that it is the very truth you tell, no matter how startling it may seem.”

“Promise me that you will, Basil! Promise that you will believe me. Much hangs upon it. Much!”

The anguish in his face as he made this appeal was so distressing that I was in haste to assure him I would place every dependence on his words. He shook his head for a moment, as though he

doubted *my* veracity; and then looking me in the eyes, spoke slowly and distinctly.

“When you heard the contents of that letter you were scandalized and shocked. You have lived with it too long now to remember just how dismayed you were. If you felt so, think what it meant to your Aunt Tulip! Now, double and treble that a hundredfold—and that is what it meant to me! As for you, you had heard my stories at the fireside. You thought you knew my past. The letter shocked and amazed you; yet you thought I was receiving but my just due. Can you imagine the feelings of my wife under these circumstances? She, too, had learned of the past, but she thought, with every just reason, that I but lied. This letter and its bearer seemed to prove these uncurbed adventures true, yet she accepted the conditions of the letter without cavil, and made the best of a mean bargain. But to me ——! For I knew something that neither of you knew—that no one in the whole world but Joan knew! And that was that there never was, and never had been, anybody in my entire life named Jean,—or anything else! That my past of license and debauchery was but a myth! *That the letter and the bearer were a lie!!*”

“A lie!” I cried.

“A lie,” said he, “and a vicious one, for there isn’t an atom of truth in either!”

“But—you sat by and accepted it as a fact!”

“No,” he replied decisively, “my wife accepted it for me. There was nothing I could say.”

“Nothing! You could have cried that it was not so!”

“Would you have believed me?”

“Well——” I stammered.

“To what end should I, a liar, tell the truth? I could have convinced no one. I had lied and lied and lied, and now were these selfsame lies swarming back to overwhelm me. My own wife, when she read the letter, never stopped to catch my eye that all was well. Simply she took the letter and the bearer both to heart. You, who next to your aunt are dearer to me than any other, did you say to me, ‘Uncle Dickon, is this story true?’ No! You looked upon the letter as though it were Holy Writ! You never doubted, either of you, that I had done this thing!”

“It seems to me that somehow you could have proved——”

“It seems to you, because you cannot see it with my eyes. For years I’ve posed before the crowd as a loose-living hind, and now if I should say, ‘She is not mine,’ they’d think me but the lower. To-day no doubt they laugh and say, ‘Old Dick Tremaine, the hero of a score of rut-tish tales, now has his bird of conscience home to roost.’ It is better that they speak of me thus

than they should say, 'He thrust her from his door.' "

"You say you never knew a girl named Jean?"

"Never, I swear! And, mark you, what cunning there is in it. 'Tis Joan who comes to bring this note to me. Her very grace and beauty points it as a lie; yet who would, I ask you, disbelieve her tale when she would tell it, hanging modest head? Ah! She's soft-tongued and burns a modest blush. And yet she represents a lie—a low and vicious lie—and well she knows it!"

"I'll hear no word against the maid I love!" I cried—but tight he held my arms, and bade me to remember that I had promised to accept as true all things he told me.

"You'll hear from me the truth about this love of yours! Oh, she is beautiful, this strange maid. Her skin is white, her hair is black as night. Her eyes are filled with warm and lingering lights. Her breath is perfumed, and her lips are ripe. And yet she is the daughter of Belial, and knows no truth. She knows full well she is not what she claims. Her heart is blacker than her jetty hair!"

"Do you ask me to accept this as truth!"

"You *must*! Thank God, one danger is past, and you are safely wedded to another; one whose great name should make you love her more. In this new life of bliss you soon shall lose the mem-

ory of the other. You are still young, and, though it will be a trial to you to learn that this girl you thought you loved is false to truth, the pain will shortly pass. To me, who now am old, it has set me in my bed thinking the matter over. I could not understand why she had come! If it was a home she sought—none have I ever turned away. If it was revenge—I have done naught to any but myself and my dear wife. Was she here to spy—I have nothing to conceal. Was it for gold she came—little have I uninvested. Yet she is here for a purpose. What? I've thought of murder, of treason, of hate, of love, of smuggling, of pillage, of rapine. I've spied upon her with the thought of some felony, or outrage, or offense,—to trick her into some transgression, some malefaction, some crime. I have huddled in my bed here, and listened—while she crept about in the dead of night! While she dug deep graves beneath the house! While she brewed strange potations that would poison us all! While—God love me!—she whisked away on a broom to the Witches Sabbath, and a score of owls hooting behind her!”

“Uncle Dickon,” said I quietly.

“Basil, my boy,” and he took my hand again, “I've been a tortured soul; have patience with me. I know she only aids your aunt, and teases the cat, and sings sweet songs, by day. But

when I lie here and think why she has come with that letter—the night has a thousand horrors, and a mouse in the wall is worse than a band of brigands by day.”

“You have become too worked up over the matter.”

“Worked up! Worked up! I *am* worked up! She and your aunt as thick as—goodness knows—and look you, when she set her cap for you! And when I saw that you were leaning toward her! And when you came to me and asked my blessing! You cannot know—no one can ever know—how I could feel, having first damned myself with falsehoods, that now I was about to visit evil on to you, whom I loved as a son.”

“It must all come right in the end,” I said, patting him reassuringly. “You say that there is not one word of truth in the letter she brought.”

“Not one, upon my soul! There have been times when I have thought I had gone suddenly mad; and that I would wake from this ordeal as one wakes from a nightmare. But talking it over with you this day has done more to strengthen my belief in my own sanity than a score of doctors might do with their assurance. This Jean, I say, I did not know. There never *was* a Jean, as far as I am concerned. There never was any woman in my life, I tell you. It is false throughout, for no matter what I may condemn in

the past, I suffer no regrets over transgressions of this nature. Believe me, Basil, on my solemn oath, no woman, living or dead, can bring this charge against me, regardless of my stories in the tap. This Jean never existed—never! She was but born in the brain of whoever wrote that letter. She is a myth! ”

“ But Joan,” said I. “ She, thank God, is flesh and blood enough. Surely *she* was not born of letter writing? Despite what you have said—despite what I have done—she is the only maid I love. Even if she is lost to me forever, tell me the truth, Uncle Dickon, who is Jean? ”

“ God knows! ” he replied. “ I only know that she is none of mine. If you could answer your own question, now, I think I would give you outright The Silver Ship. Who, or what, or why, or whence she came, I do not know. I’ve told you all the truth of which I have knowledge.”

CHAPTER XIV

TELLING OF JOAN

THERE was a ring of truth, a sort of pathetic sincerity, in the voice of Uncle Dickon, and I knew, without consideration of his protestations, that he was telling all that he knew and all that he believed. Notwithstanding her many fascinations, which he admitted and secretly adored, my uncle was more terrorized by Joan than he would have been by Beelzebub himself, had the latter honored *The Silver Ship* with his presence. Knowing that her claim upon him was false, and seeking through his now distorted imagination a reason or purpose for her stay, his fancies had carried him so far afield that rationality was long since cast adrift; thus had he awakened from sleep in the witching hours to discover her, bat-winged and horned, an Incubus upon his chest, he would have probably suffered some satisfaction in the realization that matters were better than he had anticipated.

I did everything I could to make him believe I felt all was well, and that if he made a clean confession to his wife he would have nothing further to fear. And while I received his promise that

he would go to her at once, and watched after him as he went down the passage to her room, I had some misgivings lest his courage might ooze away before he arrived. I never saw a man so thoroughly intimidated. Evidently he feared assassination—or worse. He stopped at each angle of the wall to peer around and prove that nothing lay in wait for him. His safe arrival at her door seemed less convincing of his immunity from harm than merely a coincidental accomplishment. He looked back and shook his head. Guilt has mounted the scaffold with less laggard feet.

“Have faith in me,” Joan had said. I closed the door of Uncle Dickon’s room, and raising the window in the hall, leaned with my elbows on the sill to drink in the cool morning air. It was still early in the day, and the frosty chill of the night lingered. I thought of a glass of something warm at the tap, not in a convivial spirit certainly, but that I had not yet broken my fast, and was closing the sash when the familiar, “Burlington, ho!” caused me to recognize the slight figure toiling up from the direction of the river. He waved his hand in hearty greeting, and I could do no less than respond, and await his approach.

“Good-morning, bridegroom,” he grinned, when he had gotten close beneath the window.

“Good-morning,” said I shortly.

“You are up betimes,” he said.

"Yet you have beaten me, apparently."

"A horseman woke me as I slept by the water. He rode north with a message. I learned it from him, and thought to bring it to you, and another, as a wedding gift."

"What is it, Peter?"

"Two days ago the frigate *Success* dropped anchor at Philadelphia. Your brother Roger is now in command. He carried a pardon for a pirate, one George, or Jonathan, Lambertine, and also for his crew—such ones as can be found. Particularly I think it speaks of the Italian mate; for it was he, you know, who was imprisoned in France with Captain Lambertine. He has clung faithfully by him in this latest adventure, surely. The message is a summons for Lambertine to appear without fear of arrest or hindrance."

"Who was the messenger?"

"Why, a certain Jacob Plimmer, I would say."

"But why should Plimmer ride north? He knows as well as you do that Lambertine lies at The Silver Ship."

"He should," mused the peddler. "He certainly should. But it might be, now, that he wants to give the Captain time to think over the matter, and make certain arrangements with any moneys he may have stored away. The pardon's

true enough, but it does no good to be in haste with such things. Plimmer knows this only too well."

"It surprises me to think," said I, after some reflection, "that the thief-taker would show such delicacy toward Lambertine."

"Well, you see," Peter could always explain anything, "Master Plimmer is a reasonable man—a very reasonable man. And, besides, I believe he gets so much money for every league he rides in search of him."

"It is wonderful news, Peter. I was just about to take a nip of brandy in the tap. Would you care to join me?"

He rubbed the back of his hand thoughtfully over his lips, and agreed that a drop could do him no harm. So I descended.

"How is your sweet wife?" asked he when we had poured a dram in the empty tap and were dallying with our glasses before we downed it. There was a slyness about the manner in which he put the question; a sort of tongue-in-the-cheek pose which I would have accepted from no one else, and which I resented from even a bearer of such good tidings.

"Why do you ask?" I responded. "There would seem to you, Peter, a portion of humor in my marriage."

"Nay, nay," he answered hastily; "I but won-

dered if she were her spry self after yesterday's adventure."

"I have not seen her since our arrival here last night. You know, from what we both told you, that this marriage is to be set aside. She, as she told you, loves Captain Lambertine. I had also hoped for other bonds, myself. However—first we must sever this union, as you can see."

"I do not think you should," said Peter. "I do not think you can! For one, I am a witness, and it was a right good marriage. I will stand by Father Kelpius, when he comes here this morning, and say that I think it was all in order, and should not be reversed."

"Father Kelpius!" I said. "Does he come here?"

"I would think so, and this morning. Hark! 'Tis him speaking to Peggie at the door now." And the little peddler hurried out to meet the priest. Shortly they both stood in the doorway of the room where I sat.

"Blessings upon you," said the good man, "and how is Captain Lambertine this morning?"

"I am not Captain Lambertine," said I.

"So I understand," he answered, "but I was wondering how Captain Lambertine might be after the receipt of a letter which I sent him last night—by your wife."

"You must go up to see him yourself. I was

with him for a time, early to-day, but no mention was made to me of any letter."

"It was in regard to a rumor of a pardon for him from the King—and other matters."

"Now!" cried the peddler, striking his hands together in disappointment, "I had hoped to be the first to bring good news. How did *you* learn of it, Father?"

"I pieced it together from some words de Bournonville let fall. Have you confirmed it then, Peter? Good! And now, as to that gentleman himself: when I returned from bidding you and your party farewell, de Bournonville was gone. Have either of you seen or heard of him?"

"He did not follow me," I said.

"I think," remarked the peddler, with a placid eye upon the ceiling, "that he took to the river, somehow.

"From what I understand from his two lovely relatives"—and he made me a bow which caused me to squirm—"he was far from a good man. I consider, if the result is his prompt departure and the consequent arresting of unwelcome advances toward Mistress Helene, that our little subterfuge of last night was morally justified, eh, Master Myles?"

"What subterfuge?" asked I.

The peddler laughed. "I tell you, Father, he still thinks that Giles is holding that pistol at the

window. Bless you, I had rapped him over the head and bundled him into the bushes before he had time to get comfortable."

"I know," said the priest. "He was at my door this morning, with a lump on his brow the size of an egg. Giles is a good fellow enough, but he was serving the wrong master. I gave him his breakfast, and he is cleaning the stable for me now, or he's not an honest man."

"He's a dullard," laughed Peter. "Though I do think," he added with a sly wink, "that even he could see through a veil."

"Now he is laughing at you, Master Myles," said Father Kelpius. "Peter must have his joke, it seems. I do not believe, however, that he really thinks you are not far more familiar with the situation than he will ever be."

"What situation?" I asked.

"See!" cried Peter, and roared again.

"Nonsense!" And the monk checked his amusement with an arresting hand. "You are perfectly aware, Master Myles, that it was not Helene de Bournonville to whom you were wed last night. We both know that, even if Peter here says you do not. You see, Peter, it was like this. Helene knew that if this undesirable cousin saw her married to another, his attentions would cease if for no better reason than respect for her husband's swordsmanship. She had hoped to

marry Captain Lambertine, and would have done so if he had kept his appointment. The meeting had been arranged with me with this purpose in view. But, as you know, he was ill, and our friend came in his stead. Josephine de Bournonville had learned of the injury, and came to inform Helene. De Bournonville suspected this might be so, and wished them kept apart; but I thought their two heads were better than my one—and I had them together while you were in with the objectionable lover, Master Myles. The somewhat unusual resemblance between our bridegroom and the Captain was the base of a plot by de Bournonville, as you heard through the door, and came to tell us, Peter.”

“True enough,” he grinned. “And it was I who thought of a counterplot to foil him, was it not, Father?”

“Well, you gave valuable advice, Peter, but it was Josephine who broached the scheme. So, now, the lights being dim, the bridal veil was placed upon Josephine de Bournonville—and no one knows better than our good friend here that when he rode away with Helene and her maid, that he but did it to impress this money-seeking, treacherous cousin of hers that his chances were as dead as his honor. Now that this pardon has come for Lambertine I expect that we have seen the last of de Bournonville, eh, Peter?”

"I expect so," said Peter thoughtfully, and his eyes dwelt again upon the ceiling.

"Do you know why Giles returned to me this morning?"

"Because you would give him to eat instead of a taste of a strap."

"No, Peter. Because he was frightened. When he came to, after your attentions, he went to the barn where he had left the big one-eyed servant of Monseigneur. In the dim dawn he found him dead."

"I shot him after he had attempted to kill me very treacherously," I said.

"So I understood. The ball from your pistol, strange to relate, struck him a glancing blow just above the eye socket. Evidently a sliver of bone destroyed the sight, but had he been given proper attention he might have lived. Giles hated this man, I believe, and being left to care for him in the barn, let loose the bandage so that his blood might flow. 'Twas this which caused him to die, Giles thinks, and he says further that the expression on the poor fellow's face was as though at the last his two eyes were open, and it was the devil he saw before him."

"Hah!" said Peter, and crossed himself. "Yet, Father, if any man earned death, he had. It is the one reason for which I will ever love Giles—that he let him bleed. Out I go now, and I'll

make it a point to stop and wring his hand for the doing the first time I pass your stable."

"And so I was married by you to Josephine de Bournonville?" said I, when the peddler had left us two alone.

"Just as you wished," responded Father Kelpius.

"Why should you think that?"

"Because I had her word for it."

"Whose word?"

"Josephine's! Why?"

"Because I never saw the girl in all my life."

"No!" cried the priest in amazement. "Why, I was told that you two had plighted your troth this good while."

"On the contrary, I was to have wedded my uncle's chi—a ward of Uncle Dickon's."

"Gracious me!" cried the good man in distress. "What have I been led into doing?"

"I fear you are as poor as I am at plotting, Father. Well, at least the Captain's affair prospers. I will seek Helene now, and find what she has to say of this." And turning from the much perturbed priest, I went up the stairs to find the Great Lady.

At the first landing stood dear Aunt Tulip.

"Well, Basil," she asked kindly, "have you seen Joan this morning?"

"No," I said briefly.

“Can you spare a moment with your old aunt in her room?”

“When I have had another interview—yes.”

“Let me speak to you first. I will not detain you long.”

I went with her grudgingly.

“Basil,” she began, when she had settled herself comfortably in her armchair, and I had perched myself on the window-sill, “your uncle was to see me this morning. He came, I understood, at your suggestion. He has been worried of late—just how much I did not realize—but his mind is at ease now. He seemed to think that if I would tell you just what I told him that you, also, would be more content. Basil, some days after Captain Rumm (and I will always think of him and call him Rumm if he *has* a dozen proper names which are better!), some days after he first came to us, a letter came for *me*, which pleased and surprised me greatly. It was from a member of my family—there is no better blood to be found anywhere, as I have told you, Basil!—and it contained information which caused many more letters to pass between me and the writer. I learned, among other things, that the sister of the writer had fallen in love with a man of whom little was known, but against whom lay a charge of piracy. This man was directed to hide here at The Silver Ship, and so certain was the infatuated girl that

he was all her lover should be, that she suggested the writer should come here as a guest, and not only satisfy herself of his fitness to be her husband, but to attempt to contradict the imputations made against him by a scheming and unworthy rival. Are you following me, Basil?"

"Can you doubt my interest?"

"Scarcely. As you know, for many years I had looked for this communication from my relatives, and it was a great delight to me that she was to make this visit. But I had one secret misgiving,—a sorrow I had long bent beneath—which I feared might cast a blight upon her stay. For years your uncle, through a strange vanity which befalls men of even greater intellect than he, had proclaimed himself hereabouts the hero of a hundred shameful ventures, all untrue, yet still so amusing to the vulgar gathering that I was certain they could not be kept from the ears of my gentle guest. My first thought was to keep them from her as best I might; but realizing this impossible to accomplish, I wrote her of the entire story, begging her indulgence, and assistance to their ending. Between us we arranged this little drama. She must naturally stay with us under an assumed name, for Captain Rumm would at once recognize *de Bournonville*. In fact, such was his interest over the maid he loved, that hour after hour he would walk with me in the garden

but to hear me speak this name so dear, and perchance learn something further of his darling. Are you still interested, Basil?"

"Almost can I guess the play-acting which followed."

"She came to us under the name of Joan, you will remember."

"Remember! But the note from Jean, Aunt Tulip? Surely she did not make that up?"

"No," said Aunt Tulip. "*I* wrote the letter from Jean. I don't know if there was a hussy named Jean in his stories or not, but that did not make any difference. One name was as good as another—and there was something appealing about 'Jean,' don't you think?"

"Aunt Tulip, I'm astonished!"

"Then came your love for Joan—which pleased me so much, and frightened your poor uncle near to death, it seems. Somehow I think, Basil, that we have heard the last of those tales in the ordinary, unless perhaps for a general denial. What think you?"

"Tell me about last night, when I rode to meet Helene for the Captain."

"Joan feared for you, and knowing your rendezvous left directly after you, and took the short road to the monastery. They were both terribly frightened about you until you turned up—and then came the marriage to fool de Bournonville.

The good Father kept you waiting as long in the entry as he dared while Joan got a good start toward The Silver Ship with the escortage of his servant. She beat you in with the tale to the Captain by a good half hour. Of course we were not certain how much you knew then, but it would seem, my boy, that you were very completely taken in. The servant returned with the request that Father Kelpius come up this morning, bringing the necessary proofs of your ceremony, and also to do a similar office over Helene and her future husband. He would hear of no union until he was cleared of the charges against him, but from a letter the priest sent by Joan, all seems well."

"Father Kelpius is below already."

"He is ever in a hurry to do good. Joan and her sister and I were together until almost daylight. Evidently the young need more rest than the old, for neither have shown themselves yet to-day. You have not seen either, have you, Basil?"

"No," said I. "But I will now go to look for Helene, and tell her that the priest has arrived. Did the Captain know all the time, when I talked with him this morning?"

"Surely. Only Dickon was not let into the secret."

Leaving her, I made my way diffidently down

the upper hall to Joan's door, and raised my hand to knock—and hesitated.

They would laugh at me perhaps, but happy as I was why should I care for laughter? Yet three times I withheld my knuckles from the panel, through embarrassment, and then—recognizing that the sooner I made my presence known the sooner would I see my love—I rapped lightly.

"Come in," said a voice. I raised the latch, and entered.

She was sitting alone in the apartment, before the mirror, was Joan, with her great mass of hair held in a vast knot upon her head by her tapering fingers. She was looking at her reflection—as who would not!—turning her head slightly this way and then that, and humming to herself as she gazed. At her elbow on the dressing-table sat Philemon, purring a languid interest in my lady's toilet. She did not notice me for an instant, but when I spoke she turned quickly and raised both her hands in surprise, allowing her heavy tresses to fall all in fragrant disorder like a sable cloak about her.

"Basil!" she cried.

"None else."

"I had sent for Cora to do my hair. I thought it was she who knocked!"

About her slender figure there hung a flimsy robe of shimmering web, from the folds of which

emerged her firm round arm, a rose-pink finger pointing to the door. If she expected me to retreat in the direction indicated her anticipation was foredoomed to failure. Instead I dropped upon my knees beside her chair, and took her tenderly in my arms.

“You can fool me no more!” said I. “You have deluded me enough—last night the worst of all, and the greater blockhead I. But at least you dupe me no more to-day. You are my wife ——”

“Basil,” she said, “let me go. You are to annul this marriage. We all know that. I have it from Helene ——”

“Enough! You may fool me no more this day,” I repeated. “From now on I will be the wiser.”

“Are you not sorry that it was not Helene after all?”

“She will tell you that I made a gloomy bridegroom.”

“Although he is lying wounded, she will have a gayer one ere sunset. My, but you were stupid not to give him the ring and the curl! He almost got away from me for sighing after her. And there was I, knowing you had it all the while, and unable to think of a way to bring you to your senses. Are you not jealous that the Captain will gain those lovely curls?”

"Nay," said I, very truthfully. "I care not for curls. Your hair is so soft and wavy. It is so I love it best."

"Well, that's a comfort; for my sister's hair is no curlier than mine. It will never do to tell the Captain now, of course, but that is why she has to have Cora always with her. Cora can do wonders with her hair."

"Thank heaven! The Captain has been fooled in something."

"Oh, yes. And she'll be the captain from to-day. She is very decided, Helene."

"She is nothing to me," I said. "Believe me, from now on *I* am master."

"You may be, if you but get you gone until I am presentable ——"

"Nay! Here now is the very basis of my tyranny!" And I drew her yielding form still closer.

"No, Basil!" she whispered. "Let me go, I beg. See! Philemon is looking again—and Cora will be walking in any minute."

"Very well," said I, rising; and taking the cat by his dignified neck, I dropped him into the hall. Then I stepped quickly within, and locked the door.

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